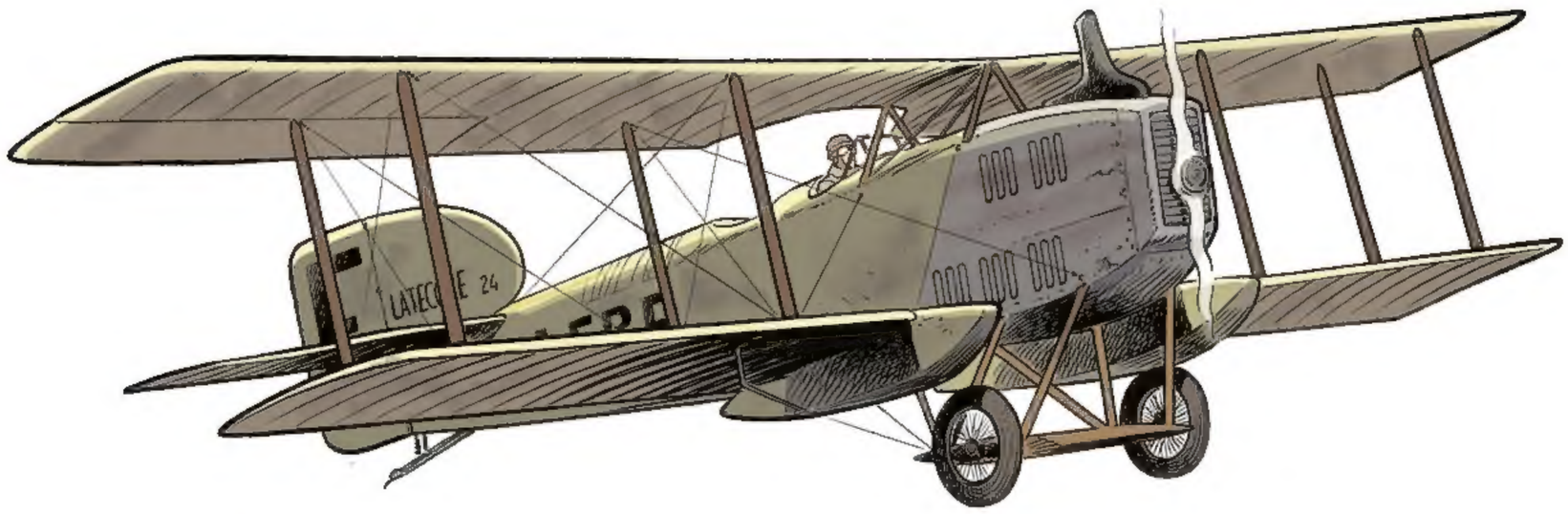
KRAEHN · MILLIEN
THE AVIATOR
3. Airmail to Africa
EUROPE COMICS



THE AVIATOR

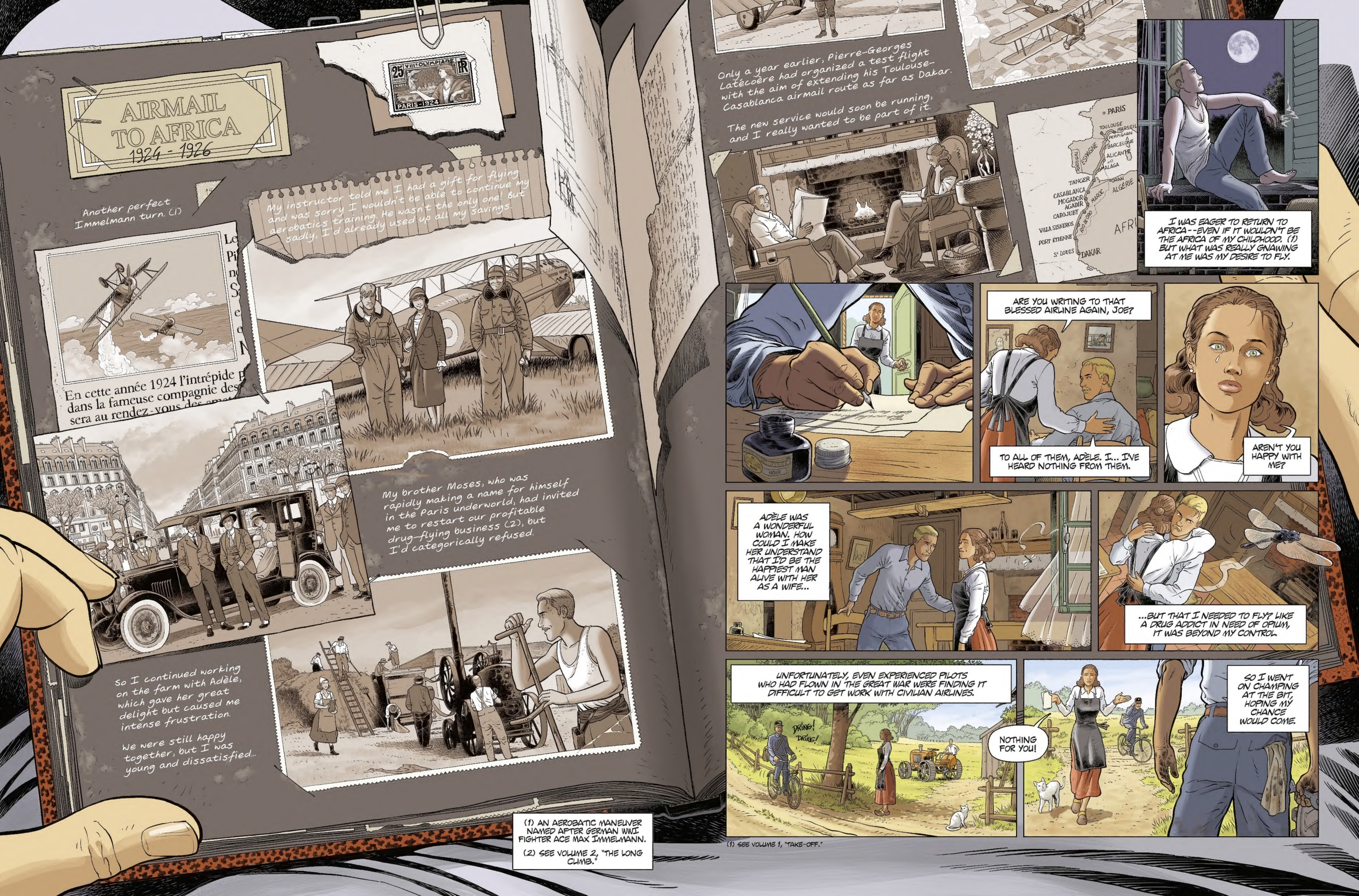
3. Airmail to Africa

WRITER
JEAN-CHARLES KRAEHN

ARTIST
CHRYS MILLIEN

COLORIST
PATRICIA JAMBERS

(1) SEE VOLUME 10 OF THE *TRAMP* SERIES, "THE CURSED FREIGHTER."
(2) SEE *TRAMP* VOLUME 9, "THE TREASURE OF TONKIN."



(1) AN AEROBATIC MANEUVER NAMED AFTER GERMAN WWI FIGHTER ACE MAX IMMELMANN.

(2) SEE VOLUME 2, "THE LONG CLIMB."

(1) SEE VOLUME 1, "TAKE-OFF."

AND THEN, ONE DAY, IT DID COME--BUT IN THE MOST UNEXPECTED WAY.

?!

RHEU! RHEU!

OSCAR!

MY OLD BUDDY OSCAR (1), ADÈLE'S COUSIN, HAD GOTTEN A JOB AS A MECHANIC WITH A FLYING CIRCUS--ONE OF MANY SMALL TEAMS OF AEROBATIC PILOTS THAT WERE TOURING THE COUNTRY, GIVING PERFORMANCES AND OFFERING PEOPLE THE CHANCE TO REALIZE THEIR DREAM OF FLYING THROUGH THE AIR.

IT'S ONLY TEMPORARY, ADÈLE. JUST FOR THREE MONTHS, UNTIL THE OTHER PILOT'S RECOVERED... I'LL SEND YOU SOME MONEY, AND YOU CAN TAKE ON A LABORER IF YOU NEED TO.

BUT THEY'RE DANGEROUS, THESE CIRCUSES...

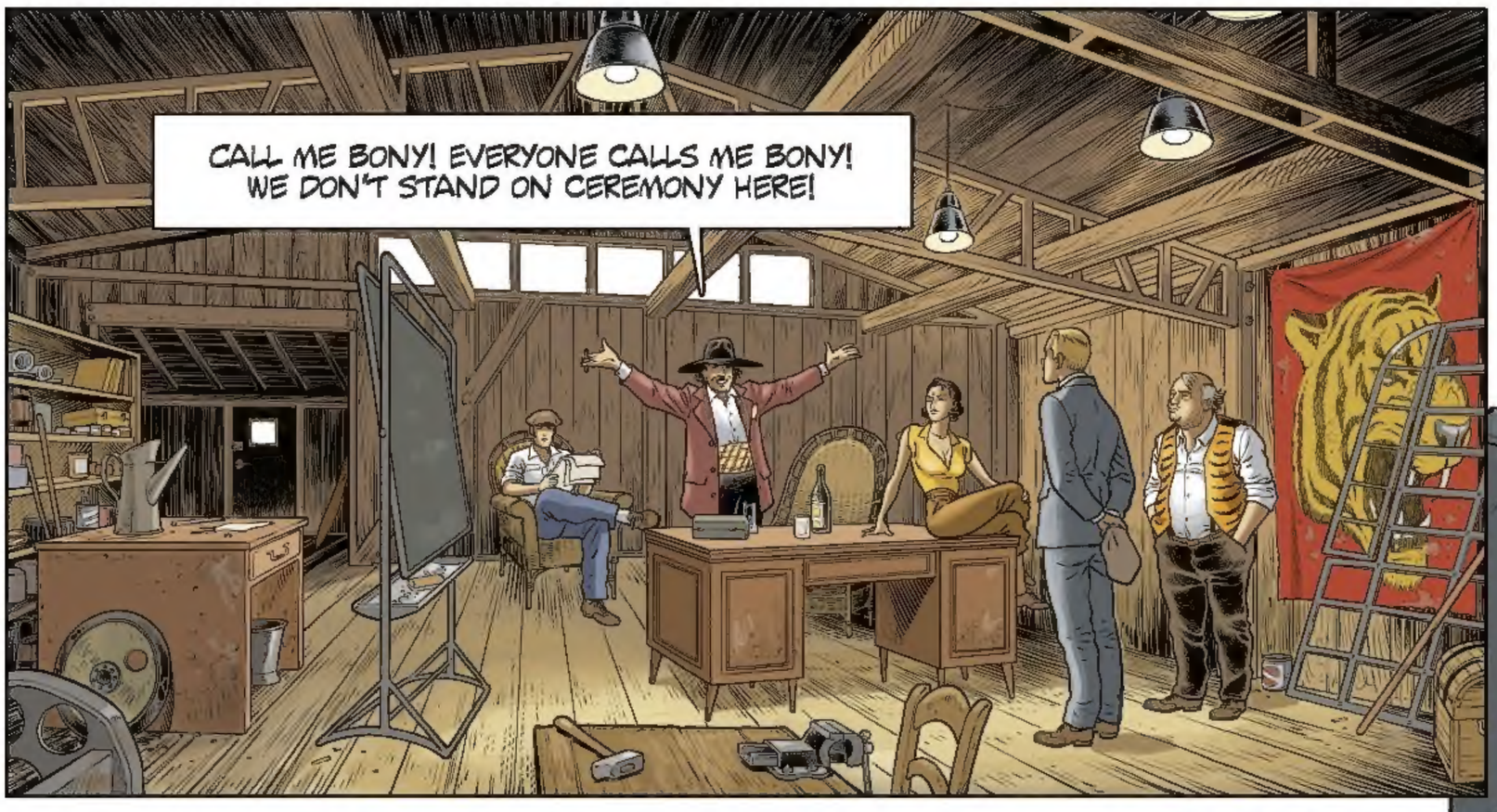
I HATE OSCAR!

BRRR

I HEARD YOU WERE AN ACE, JOSEF?

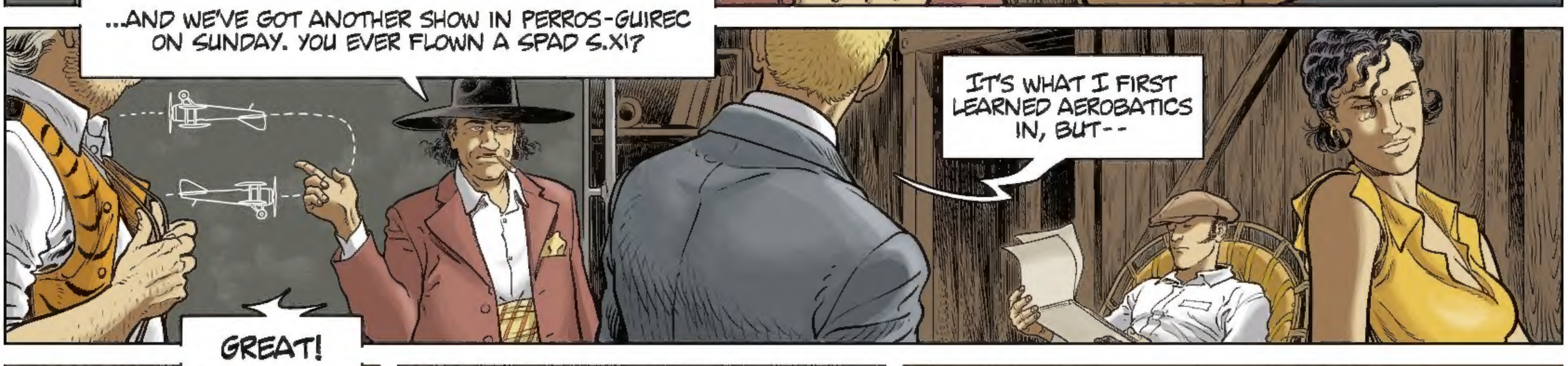
WELL, I... I KNOW THE BASICS, SIR.

(1) SEE VOLUME 2.

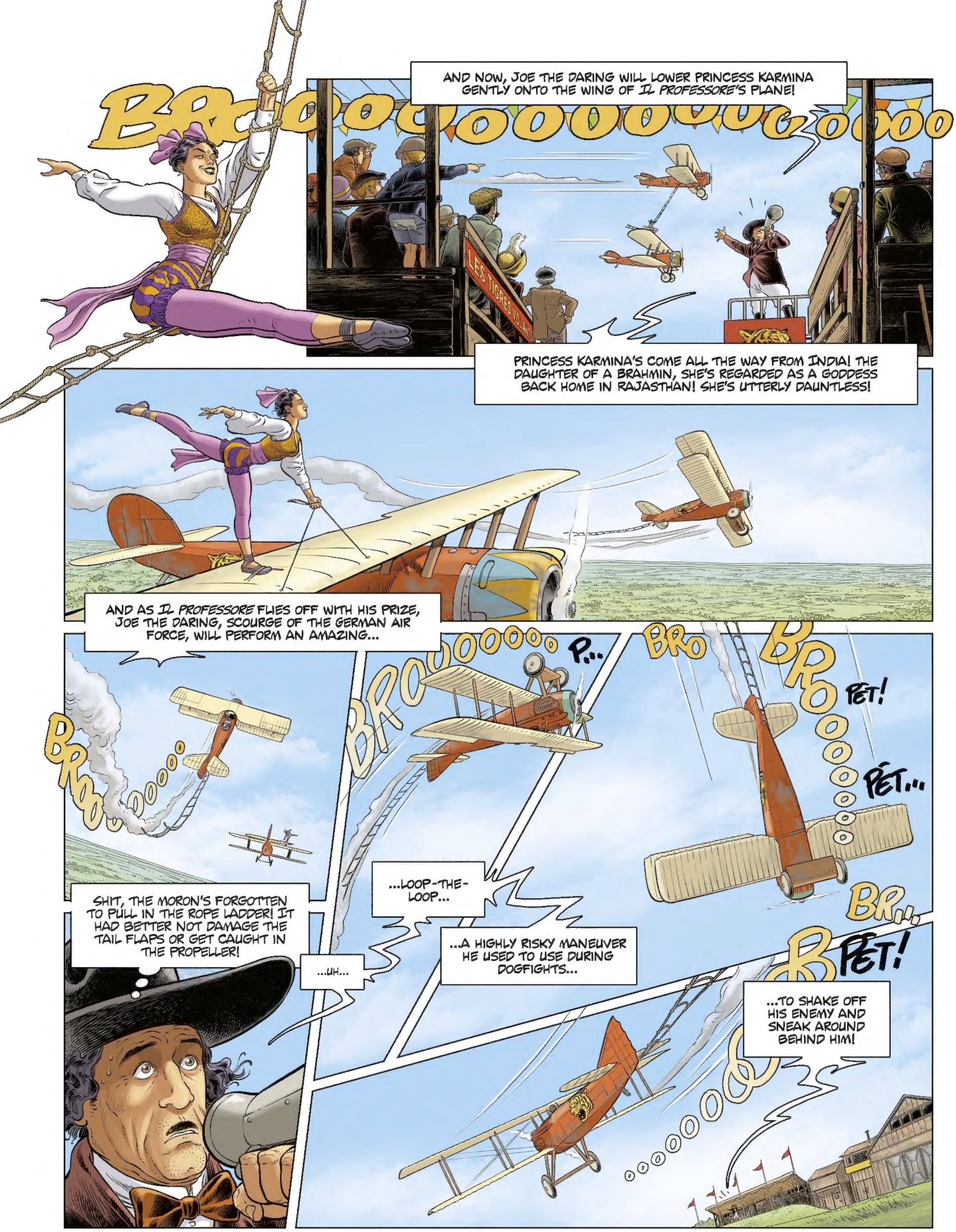

CALL ME BONY! EVERYONE CALLS ME BONY! WE DON'T STAND ON CEREMONY HERE!

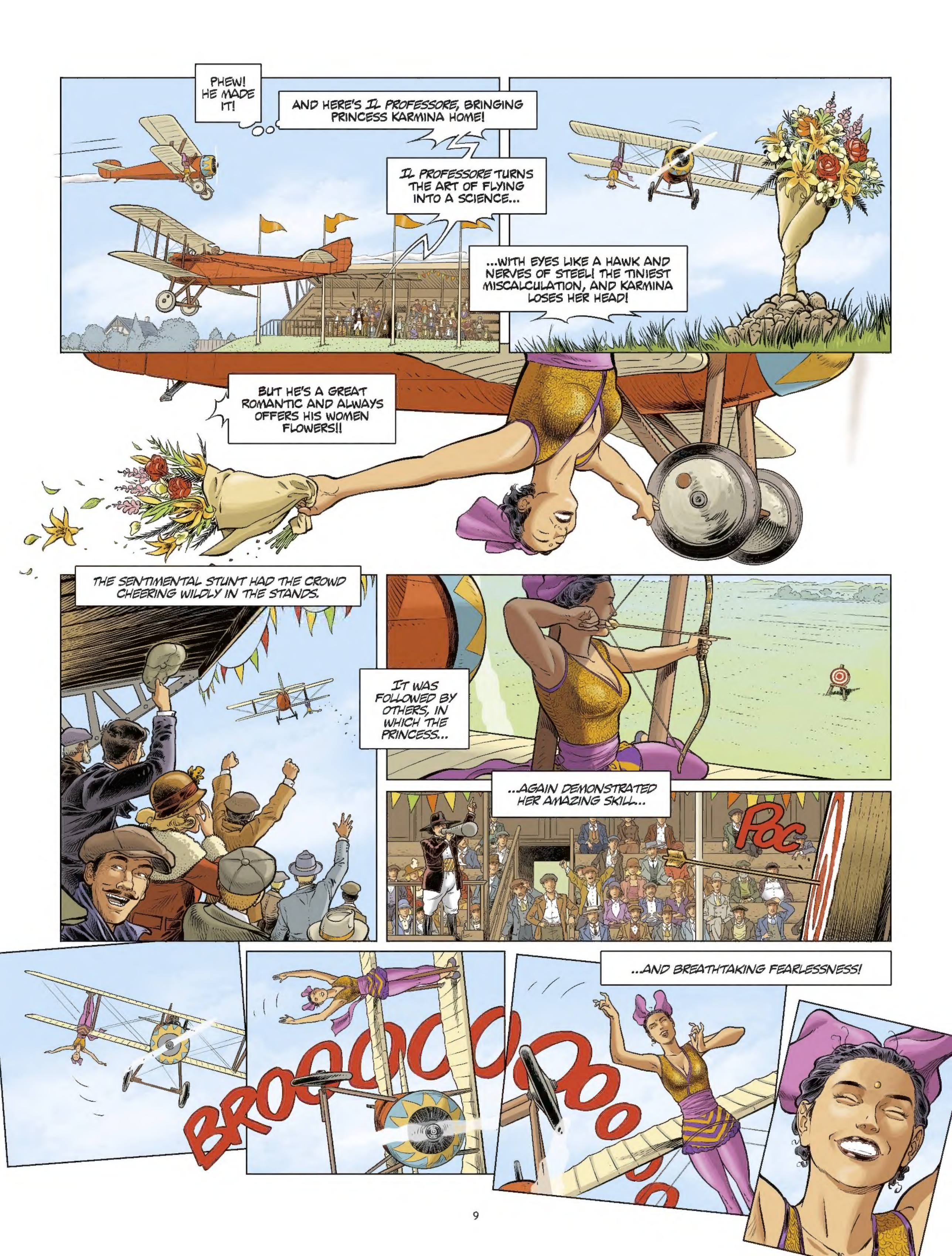
I HOPE YOU KNOW MORE THAN THE BASICS, JOE, BECAUSE THERE'S NO TIME FOR A REHEARSAL--THE SHOW STARTS IN AN HOUR.
??
CAN'T... CAN'T IT BE POSTPONED?

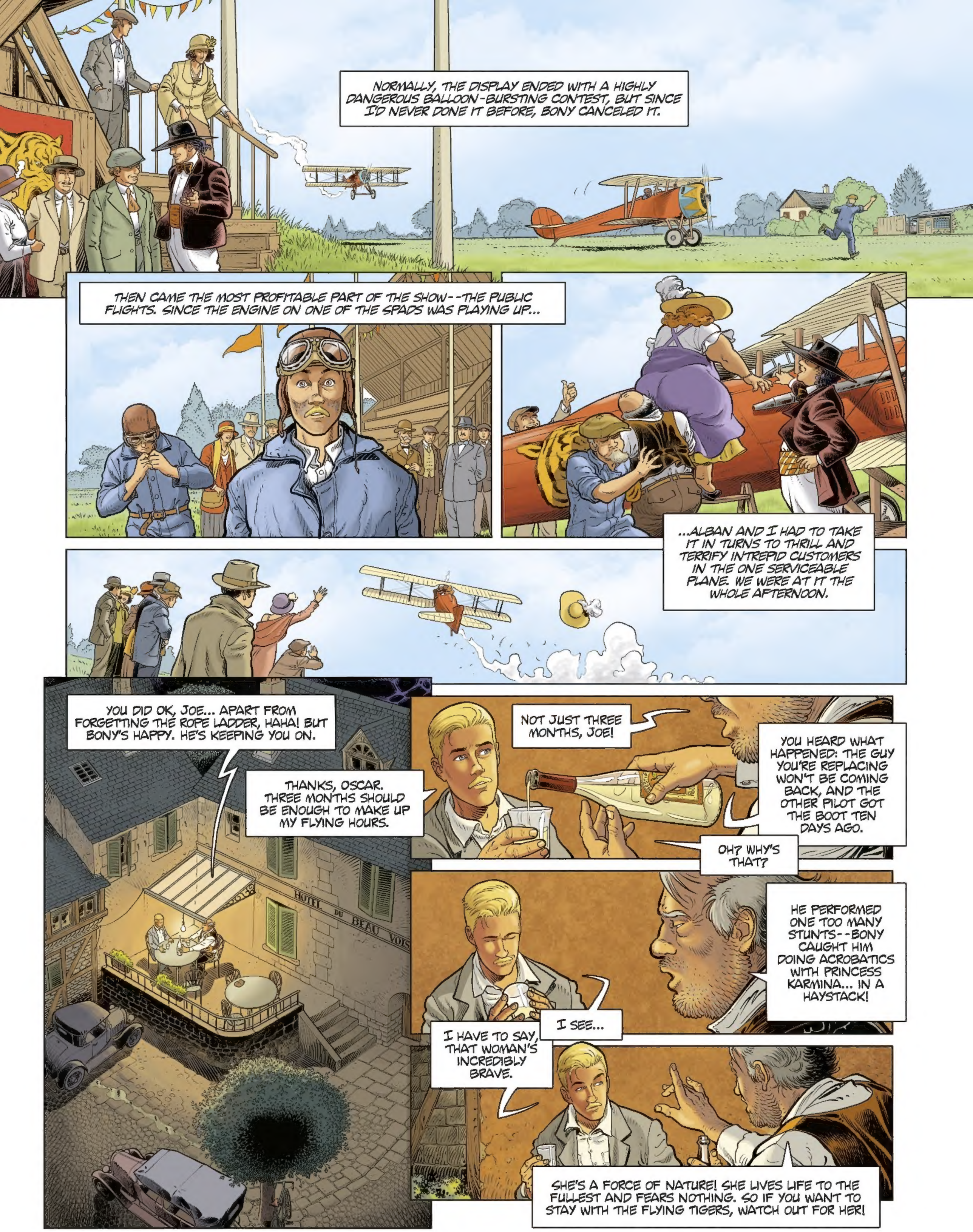
I'VE ALREADY SOLD TICKETS, PEOPLE HAVE PAID TO FLY...


...AND WE'VE GOT ANOTHER SHOW IN PERROS-GUIREC ON SUNDAY. YOU EVER FLOWN A SPAD S.XI?
IT'S WHAT I FIRST LEARNED AEROBATICS IN, BUT--

GREAT!
YOU START WITH SOMETHING SIMPLE--
SAY, BONY, HOW'S LUCIEN DOING?
??
UM... HE DIED WHILE YOU WERE FETCHING JOE.
SHIT!
IT WAS A REAL UNLUCKY ACCIDENT, JOE! THESE THINGS HAPPEN...
RIGHT...
...BUT NOT TOO OFTEN.
DON'T WORRY!


AND NOW, JOE THE DARING WILL LOWER PRINCESS KARMINA GENTLY ONTO THE WING OF IL PROFESSORE'S PLANE!
BROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO
LES TIGRES VOLANTS
PRINCESS KARMINA'S COME ALL THE WAY FROM INDIA! THE DAUGHTER OF A BRAHMIN, SHE'S REGARDED AS A GODDESS BACK HOME IN RAJASTHAN! SHE'S UTTERLY DAUNTLESS!
AND AS IL PROFESSORE FLIES OFF WITH HIS PRIZE, JOE THE DARING, SCOURGE OF THE GERMAN AIR FORCE, WILL PERFORM AN AMAZING...
BRROOOOOO
BROOOOOOOO
P...
BRO
BR
PET!
PET...
BR...
PET!
SHIT, THE MORON'S FORGOTTEN TO PULL IN THE ROPE LADDER! IT HAD BETTER NOT DAMAGE THE TAIL FLAPS OR GET CAUGHT IN THE PROPELLER!
...UH...
...LOOP-THE-LOOP...
...A HIGHLY RISKY MANEUVER HE USED TO USE DURING DOGFIGHTS...
...TO SHAKE OFF HIS ENEMY AND SNEAK AROUND BEHIND HIM!


PHEW! HE MADE IT!
AND HERE'S IL PROFESSORE, BRINGING PRINCESS KARMINA HOME!
IL PROFESSORE TURNS THE ART OF FLYING INTO A SCIENCE...
...WITH EYES LIKE A HAWK AND NERVES OF STEEL! THE TINIEST MISCALCULATION, AND KARMINA LOSES HER HEAD!
BUT HE'S A GREAT ROMANTIC AND ALWAYS OFFERS HIS WOMEN FLOWERS!!
THE SENTIMENTAL STUNT HAD THE CROWD CHEERING WILDLY IN THE STANDS.
IT WAS FOLLOWED BY OTHERS, IN WHICH THE PRINCESS...
...AGAIN DEMONSTRATED HER AMAZING SKILL...
POC
BROOOOOM
...AND BREATHTAKING FEARLESSNESS!


NORMALLY, THE DISPLAY ENDED WITH A HIGHLY DANGEROUS BALLOON-BURSTING CONTEST, BUT SINCE I'D NEVER DONE IT BEFORE, BONY CANCELED IT.
THEN CAME THE MOST PROFITABLE PART OF THE SHOW--THE PUBLIC FLIGHTS. SINCE THE ENGINE ON ONE OF THE SPADS WAS PLAYING UP...
...ALBAN AND I HAD TO TAKE IT IN TURNS TO THRILL AND TERRIFY INTREPID CUSTOMERS IN THE ONE SERVICEABLE PLANE. WE WERE AT IT THE WHOLE AFTERNOON.
YOU DID OK, JOE... APART FROM FORGETTING THE ROPE LADDER, HAHA! BUT BONY'S HAPPY. HE'S KEEPING YOU ON.
THANKS, OSCAR. THREE MONTHS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO MAKE UP MY FLYING HOURS.
HOTEL DU BEAU VOIS
NOT JUST THREE MONTHS, JOE!
YOU HEARD WHAT HAPPENED: THE GUY YOU'RE REPLACING WON'T BE COMING BACK, AND THE OTHER PILOT GOT THE BOOT TEN DAYS AGO.
OH? WHY'S THAT?
HE PERFORMED ONE TOO MANY STUNTS--BONY CAUGHT HIM DOING ACROBATICS WITH PRINCESS KARMINA... IN A HAYSTACK!
I SEE...
I HAVE TO SAY, THAT WOMAN'S INCREDIBLY BRAVE.
SHE'S A FORCE OF NATURE! SHE LIVES LIFE TO THE FULLEST AND FEARS NOTHING. SO IF YOU WANT TO STAY WITH THE FLYING TIGERS, WATCH OUT FOR HER!

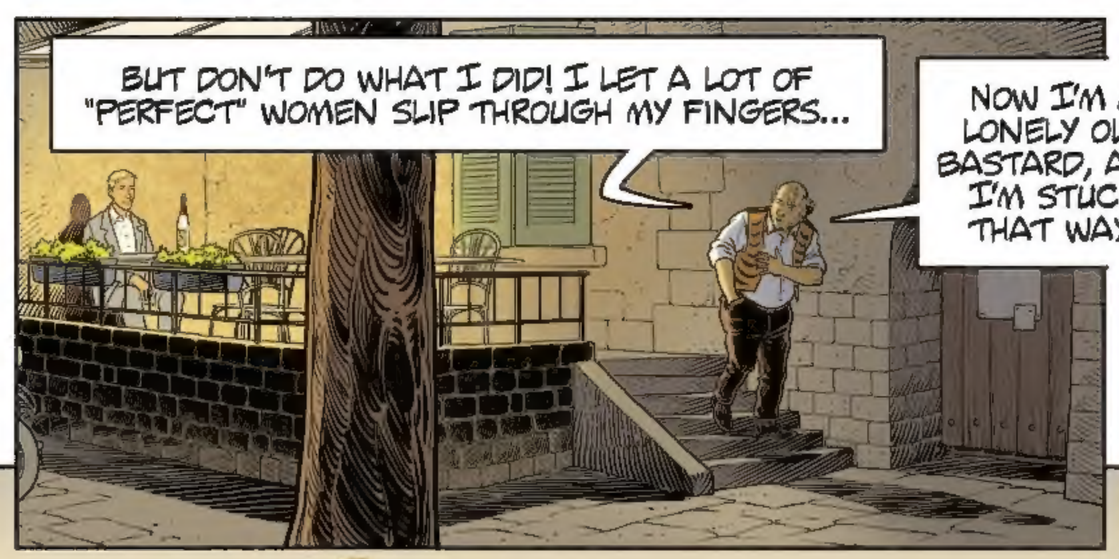
TELL ME, OSCAR, IF I STAY HERE, WILL YOUR COUSIN HATE YOU FOREVER?
IF YOU BECOME A PROFESSIONAL PILOT, SHE CAN GET SOMEONE TO MANAGE THE FARM AND COME LIVE WITH YOU.

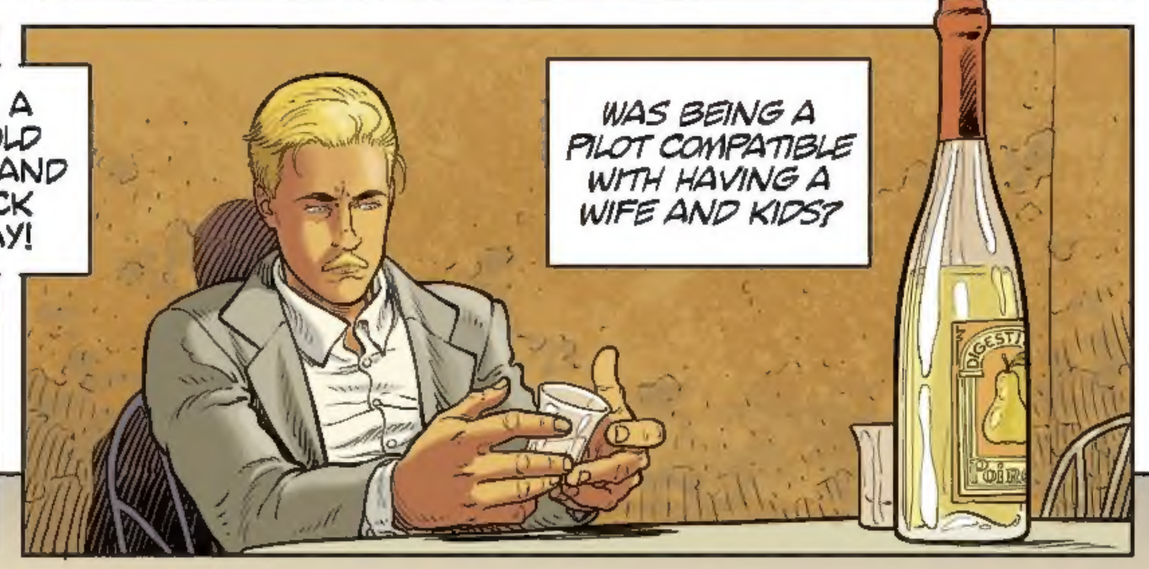
BECOME A PROFESSIONAL PILOT?
I WISH...

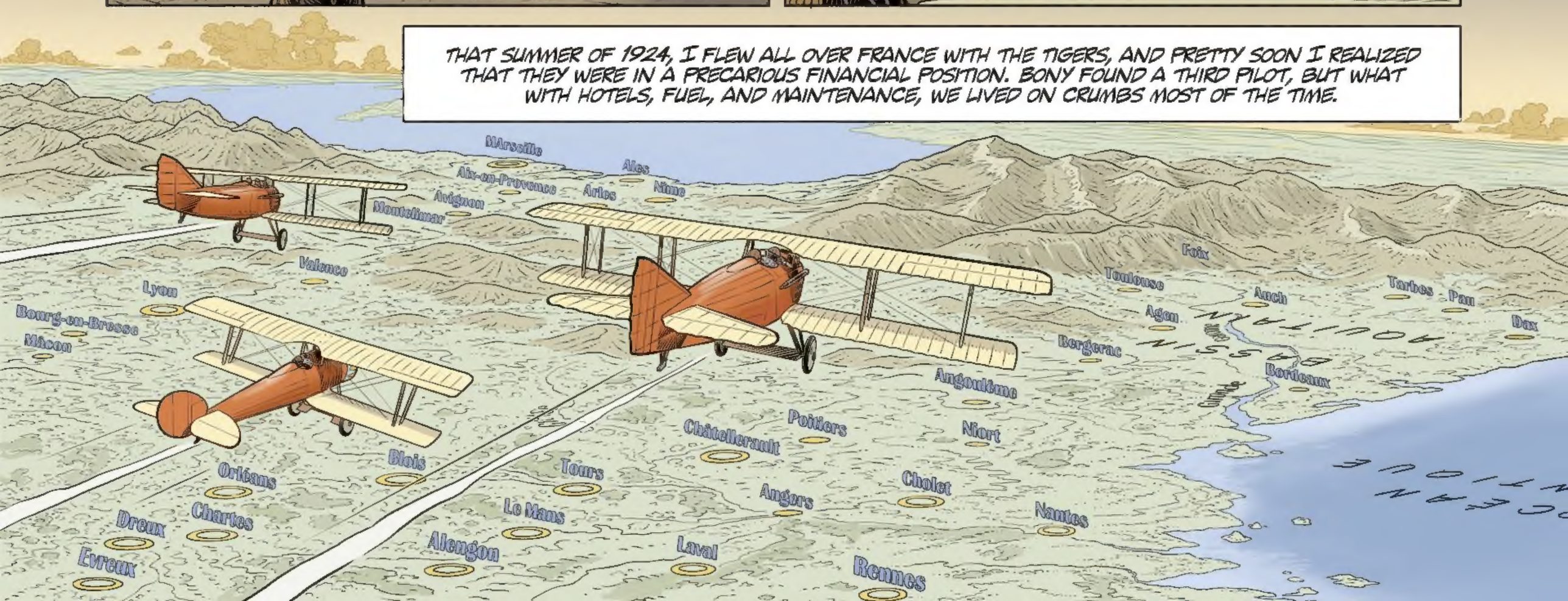
UH... JOE... LOOK, KID, I DON'T WANNA PRY, BUT...
IF YOU LOVE HER, MARRY HER.

I DO LOVE HER, OSCAR. REALLY. ADÈLE'S PERFECT...
BUT... I DON'T KNOW IF...

I GET IT, JOE. I UNDERSTAND. I WAS THE SAME...
BUT TELL HER, AT LEAST! SHE ALREADY LOST ONE FELLA IN THE WAR.


BUT DON'T DO WHAT I DID! I LET A LOT OF "PERFECT" WOMEN SLIP THROUGH MY FINGERS...
NOW I'M A LONELY OLD BASTARD, AND I'M STUCK THAT WAY!


WAS BEING A PILOT COMPATIBLE WITH HAVING A WIFE AND KIDS?


THAT SUMMER OF 1924, I FLEW ALL OVER FRANCE WITH THE TIGERS, AND PRETTY SOON I REALIZED THAT THEY WERE IN A PRECARIOUS FINANCIAL POSITION. BONY FOUND A THIRD PILOT, BUT WHAT WITH HOTELS, FUEL, AND MAINTENANCE, WE LIVED ON CRUMBS MOST OF THE TIME.
Marseille
Aix-en-Provence
Alès
Arles
Nîmes
Avignon
Montélimar
Valence
Lyon
Bourg-en-Bresse
Mâcon
Toulouse
Foix
Auch
Tarbes
Pau
Dax
Agen
Bergerac
Bordeaux
Angoulême
Poitiers
Niort
Châtellerault
Blois
Tours
Orléans
Chartres
Dreux
Evreux
Le Mans
Angers
Cholet
Nantes
Alençon
Laval
Rennes

FORTUNATELY, WHEN THE TIGERS CAME TO TOWN, THERE'D BE A PARTY. A FEAST WOULD BE LAID OUT FOR US IN THE EVENING, AND WE'D STOCK UP IN ANTICIPATION OF THE LEAN TIMES AHEAD. SOME TWO-BIT HOTEL WOULD PUT US UP FOR THE NIGHT...

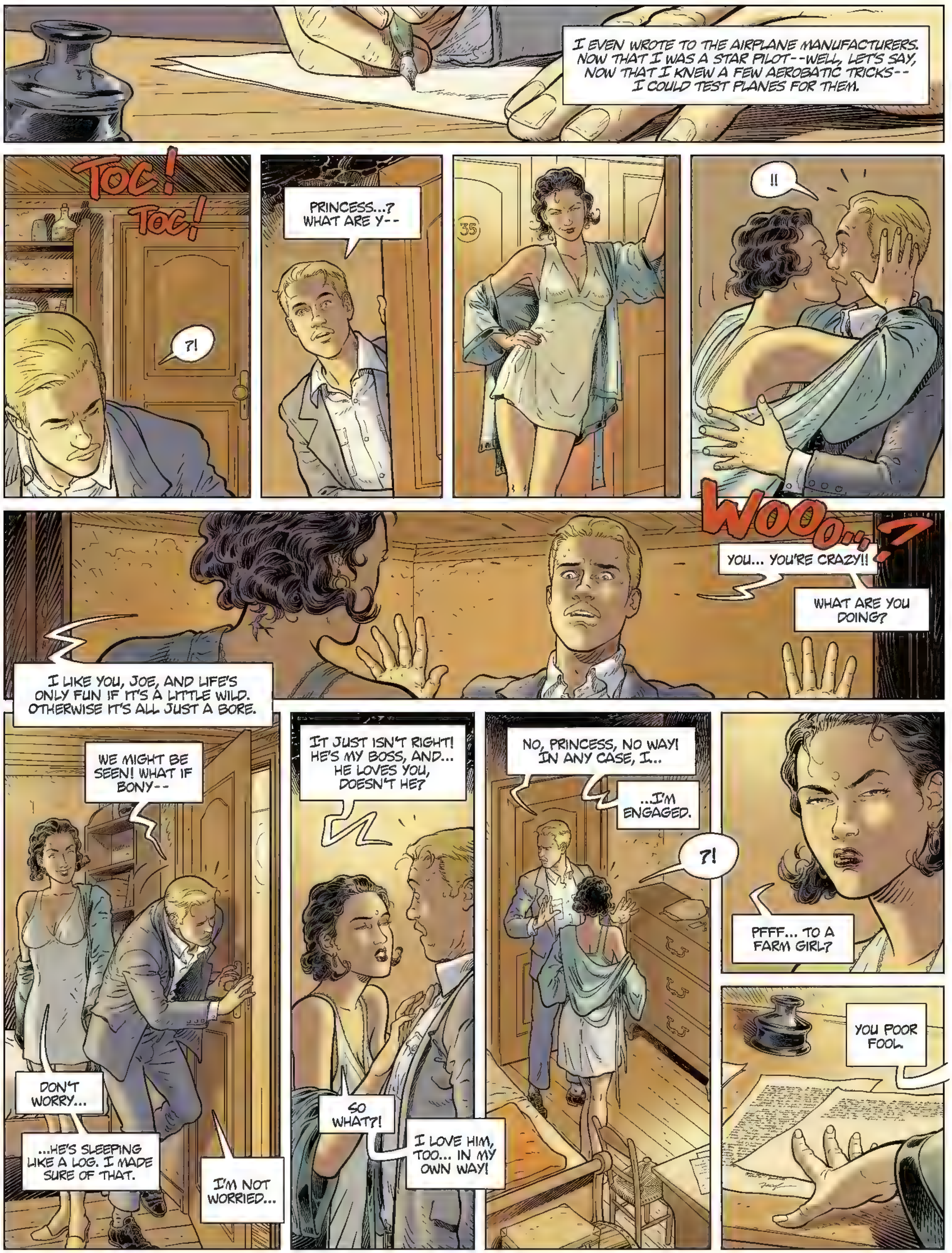
...AND THE NEXT MORNING WE'D USE THE PLANES AND THE CAR TO ADVERTISE THE SHOW.

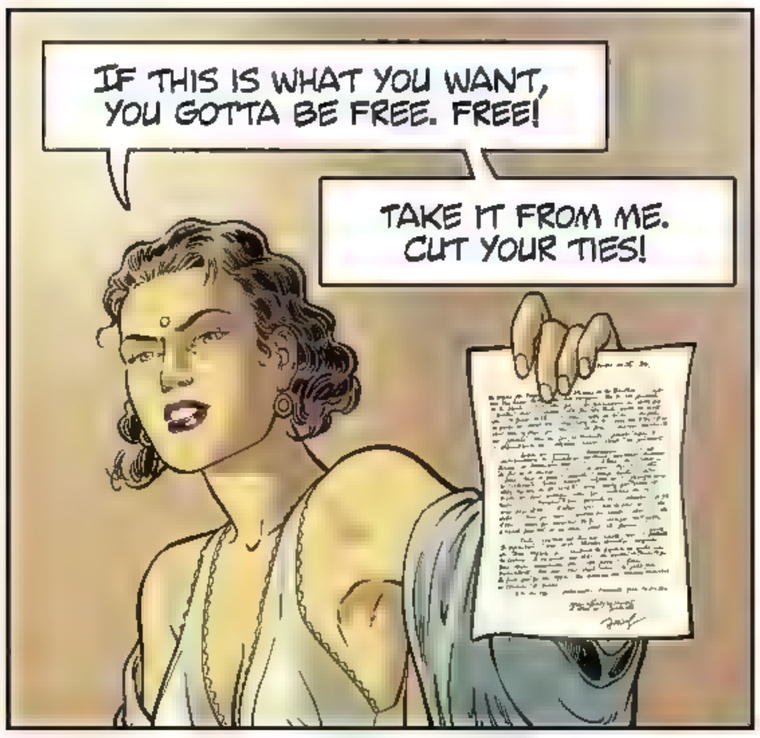
WE WERE AT THE MERCY OF THE WEATHER, TOO. NO SUN, AND THE TAKINGS WOULD BE LOW. RAIN OR HIGH WINDS, AND IT WAS A DISASTER.

I WENT BACK TO THE FARM TO SEE ADÈLE WHEN I COULD, BUT I WASN'T EARNING ENOUGH TO ASK HER TO TRAVEL WITH ME. AND IN THE END, SHE JUST GOT FED UP WITH IT. IT WAS A DIFFICULT TIME-- ESPECIALLY FOR HER, I HAVE TO ADMIT.

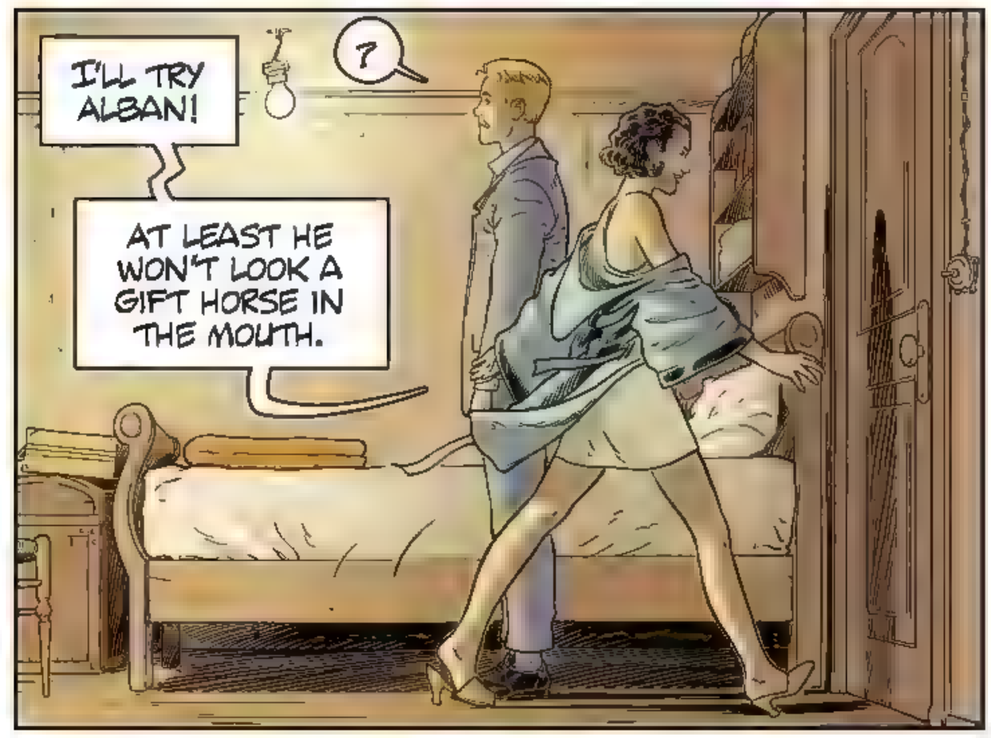
AS FOR ME, I WAS LEARNING A LOT FROM ALBAN, WHO WAS AN EXCELLENT PILOT AND, THOUGH A MAN OF FEW WORDS, A GOOD TEACHER. ABOVE ALL, I WAS CLOCKING UP FLYING TIME!

THAT MADE ME A BETTER PROSPECT FOR THE AIRLINES THAT I WAS STILL WRITING TO ALL THE TIME. NEW ROUTES WERE CONSTANTLY OPENING UP: TO LONDON, CENTRAL EUROPE, THE NEAR EAST, MOROCCO, ALGERIA...

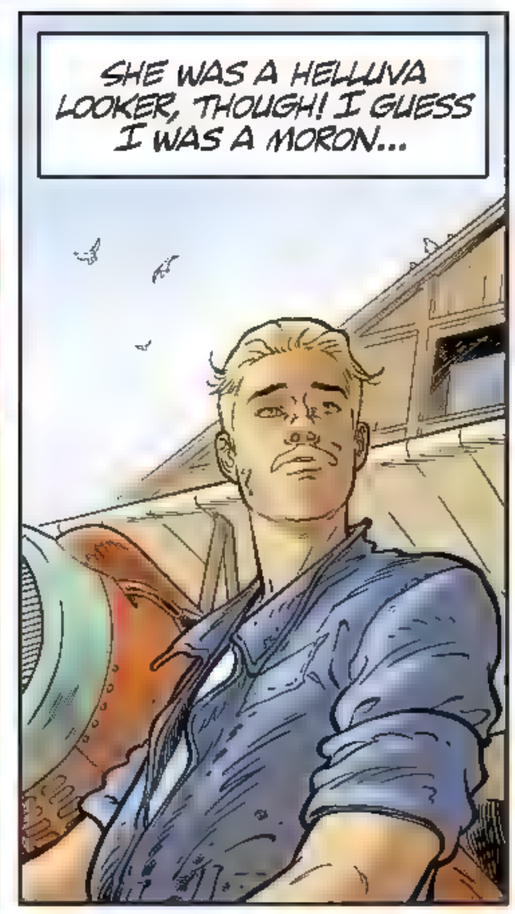

I EVEN WROTE TO THE AIRPLANE MANUFACTURERS. NOW THAT I WAS A STAR PILOT--WELL, LET'S SAY, NOW THAT I KNEW A FEW AEROBATIC TRICKS-- I COULD TEST PLANES FOR THEM.
TOC! TOC!
?!
PRINCESS...? WHAT ARE Y--
35
!!
WOOO...?
YOU... YOU'RE CRAZY!!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I LIKE YOU, JOE, AND LIFE'S ONLY FUN IF IT'S A LITTLE WILD. OTHERWISE IT'S ALL JUST A BORE.
WE MIGHT BE SEEN! WHAT IF BONY--
DON'T WORRY...
...HE'S SLEEPING LIKE A LOG. I MADE SURE OF THAT.
I'M NOT WORRIED...
IT JUST ISN'T RIGHT! HE'S MY BOSS, AND... HE LOVES YOU, DOESN'T HE?
SO WHAT?!
I LOVE HIM, TOO... IN MY OWN WAY!
NO, PRINCESS, NO WAY! IN ANY CASE, I...
...I'M ENGAGED.
?!
PFFF... TO A FARM GIRL?
YOU POOR FOOL.

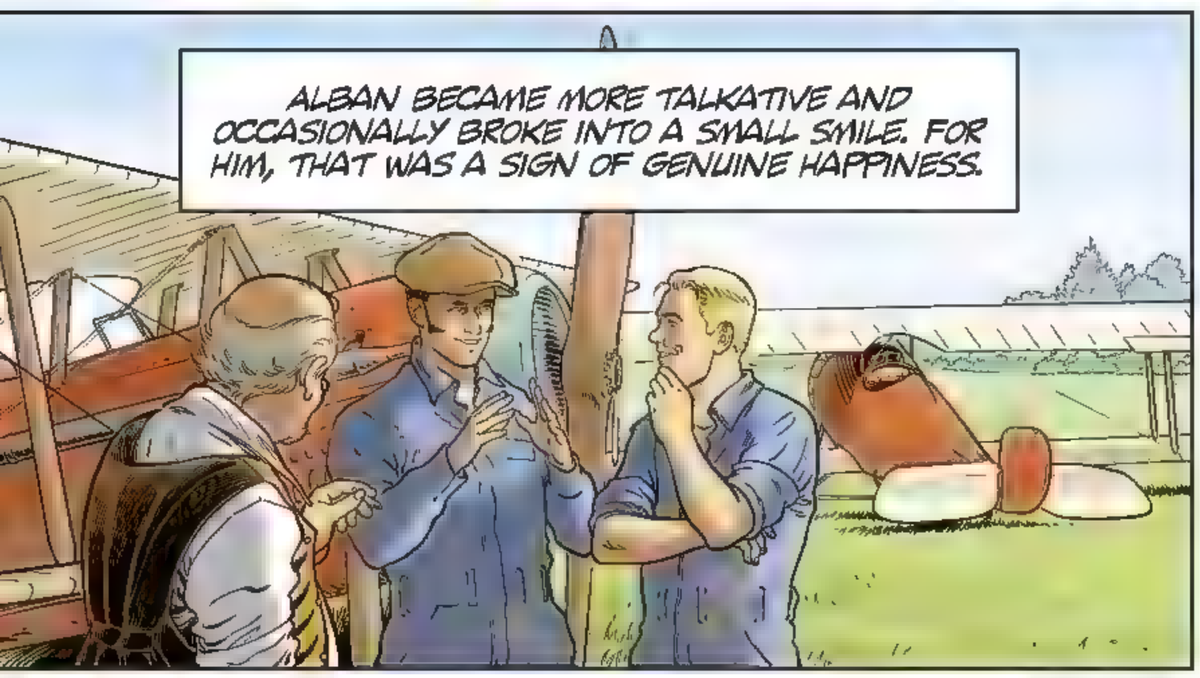

IF THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT, YOU GOTTA BE FREE. FREE!
TAKE IT FROM ME. CUT YOUR TIES!

AND TOO BAD, MORON! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING.

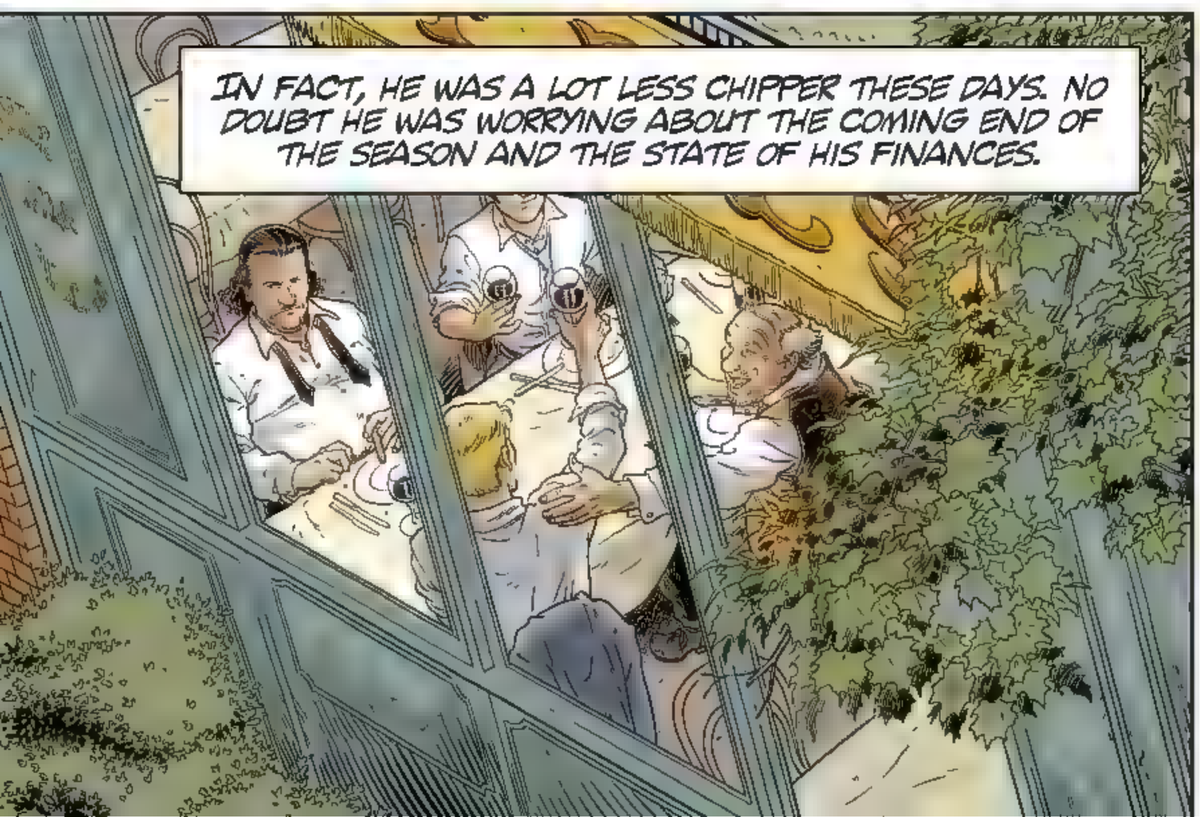

I'LL TRY ALBAN!
?
AT LEAST HE WON'T LOOK A GIFT HORSE IN THE MOUTH.

THE NEXT MORNING, KARMINA GREETED ME AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED. DAYS AND WEEKS PASSED, BUT SHE NEVER CAME ON TO ME AGAIN.


SHE WAS A HELLUVA LOOKER, THOUGH! I GUESS I WAS A MORON...


ALBAN BECAME MORE TALKATIVE AND OCCASIONALLY BROKE INTO A SMALL SMILE. FOR HIM, THAT WAS A SIGN OF GENUINE HAPPINESS.

SUMMER WOULD SOON BE OVER. WHAT WOULD WE DO IN WINTER? I ASKED BONY, BUT HE AVOIDED THE QUESTION.


IN FACT, HE WAS A LOT LESS CHIPPER THESE DAYS. NO DOUBT HE WAS WORRYING ABOUT THE COMING END OF THE SEASON AND THE STATE OF HIS FINANCES.

ON MY APPLICATIONS, I'D GIVEN ADÈLE'S FARM AS THE ADDRESS TO SEND REPLIES TO... BUT SHE'D RECEIVED NOTHING. WHEN I TOLD HER I'D LIKELY BE RETURNING IN THE FALL, SHE WARMED UP TO ME AGAIN.

AT THE START OF OCTOBER, THE WEATHER CHANGED AND BOOKINGS BEGAN TO DROP OFF. WE WERE DOING A SHOW IN AGEN.

AND I WAS ONCE MORE ADMIRING PRINCESS KARMINA'S COURAGE, BEFORE GOING OUR SEPARATE WAYS AT SEASON'S END.

WHAT A WOMAN!

SHE WAS RIGHT...

I'M A MORON FOR SURE!

WHAT'S HE DOING?!

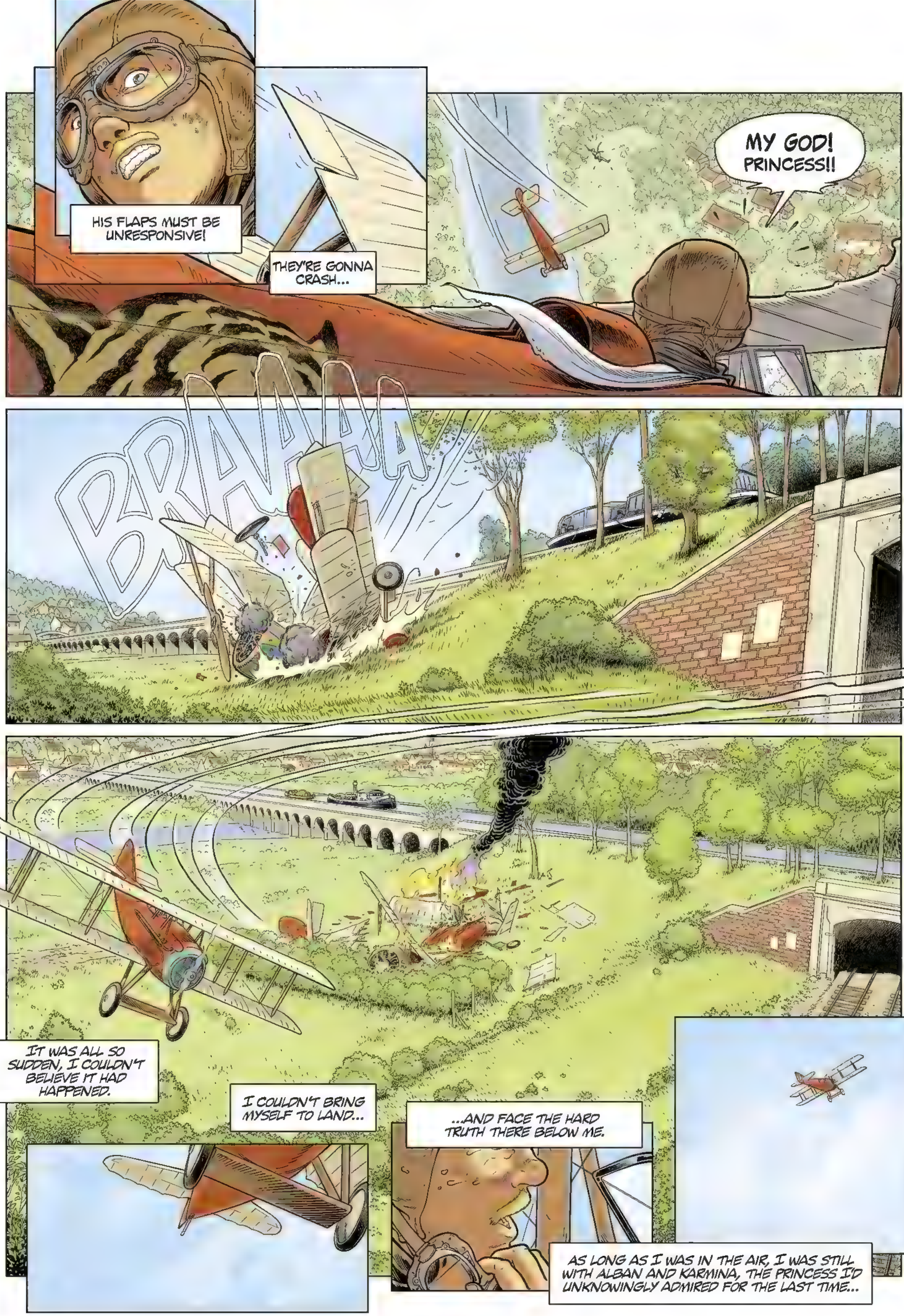
DON'T STAY FLIPPED, ALBAN!

NO! SURELY HE ISN'T TRYING A SPIRAL DIVE?!

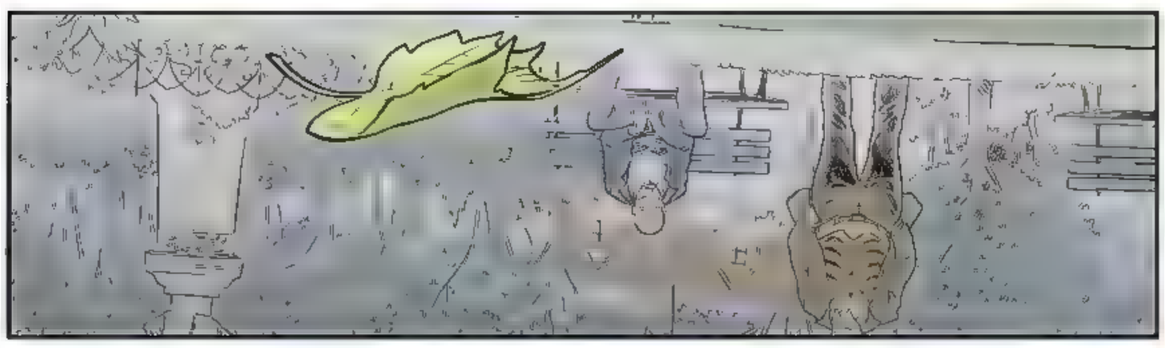
NOT WITH KARMINA ON THE WING! HE'S INSANE!!

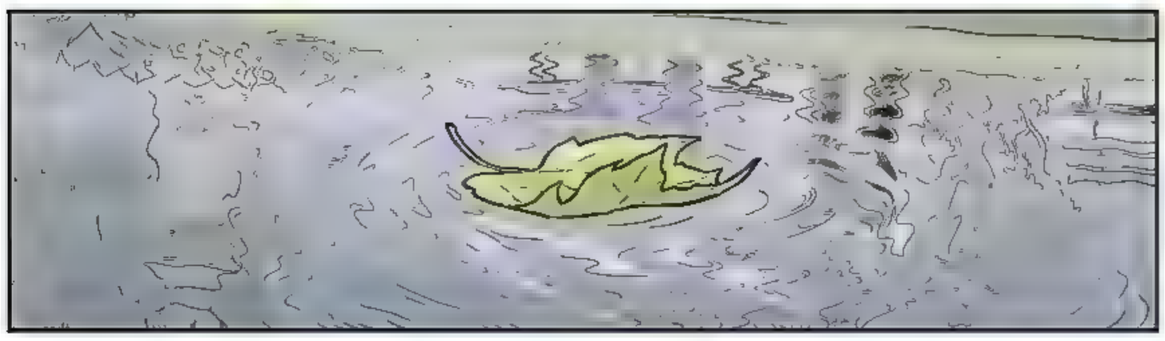
SHIT! HE'S LOST CONTROL!!

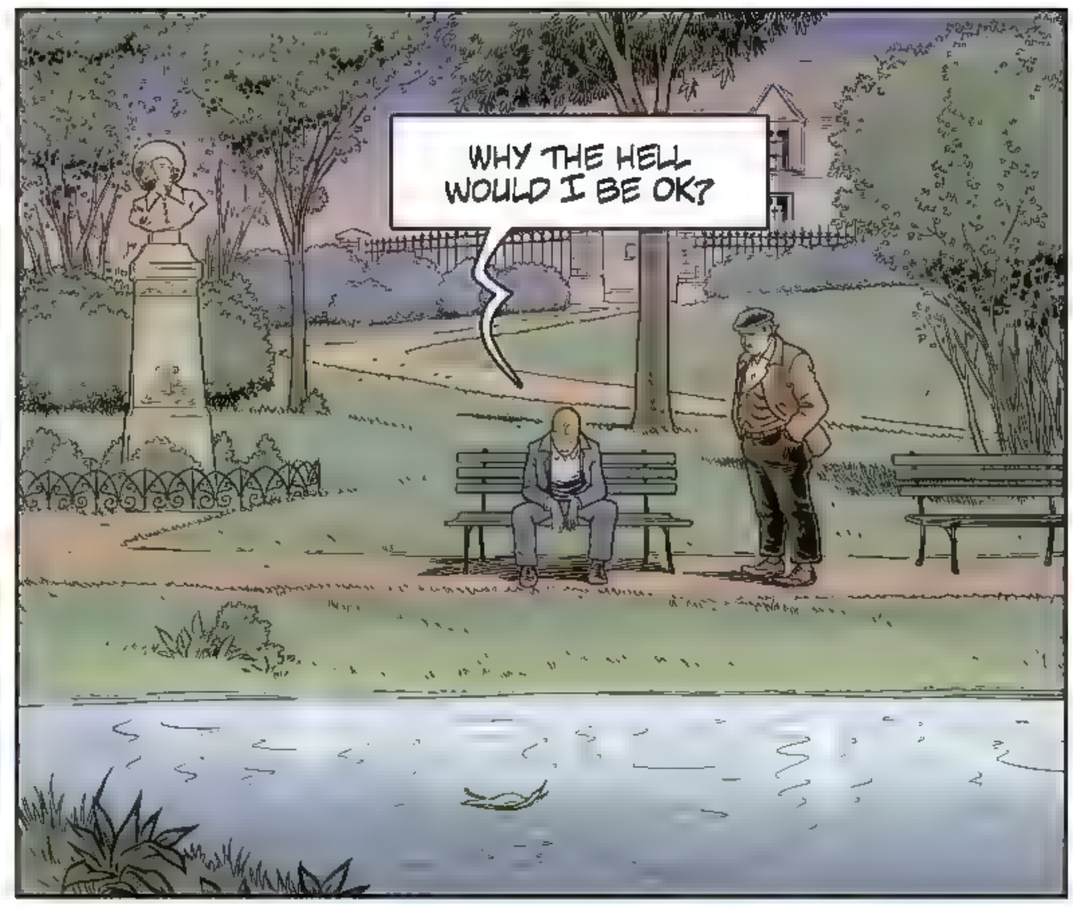
JESUS! PULL UP!!

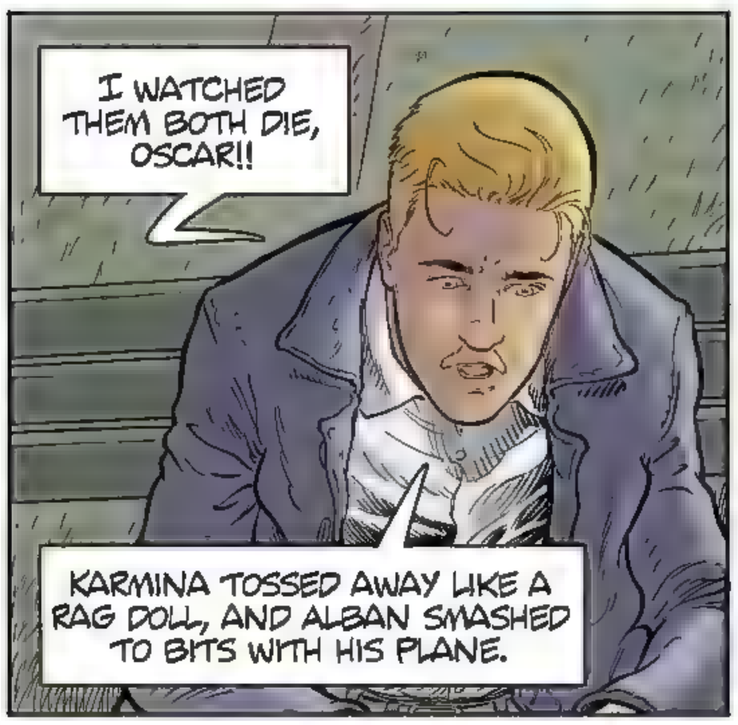

HIS FLAPS MUST BE UNRESPONSIVE!
THEY'RE GONNA CRASH...
MY GOD! PRINCESS!!
BRAAAA
IT WAS ALL SO SUDDEN, I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT HAD HAPPENED.
I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO LAND...
...AND FACE THE HARD TRUTH THERE BELOW ME.
AS LONG AS I WAS IN THE AIR, I WAS STILL WITH ALBAN AND KARMINA, THE PRINCESS I'D UNKNOWINGLY ADMIRED FOR THE LAST TIME...

YOU OK, JOE?

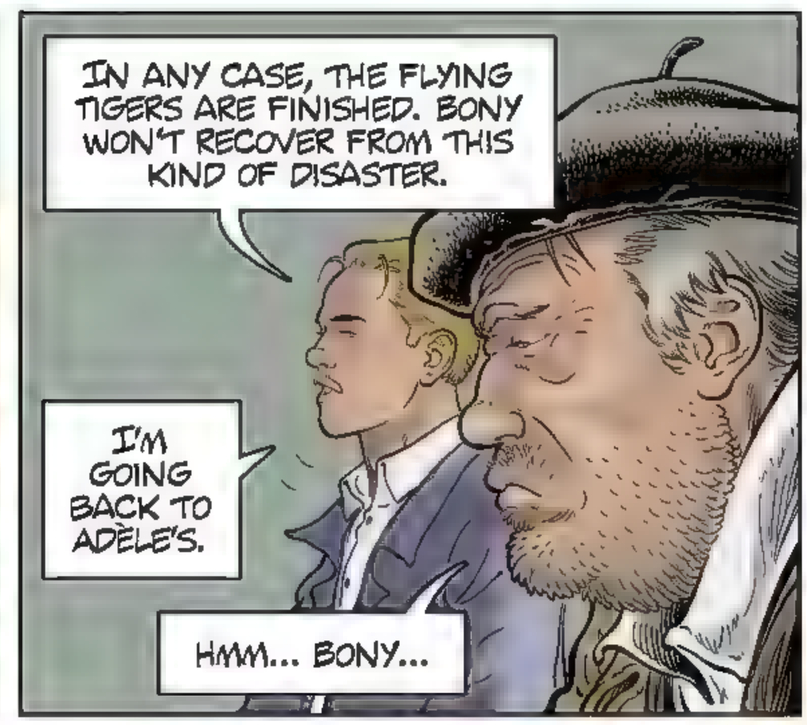




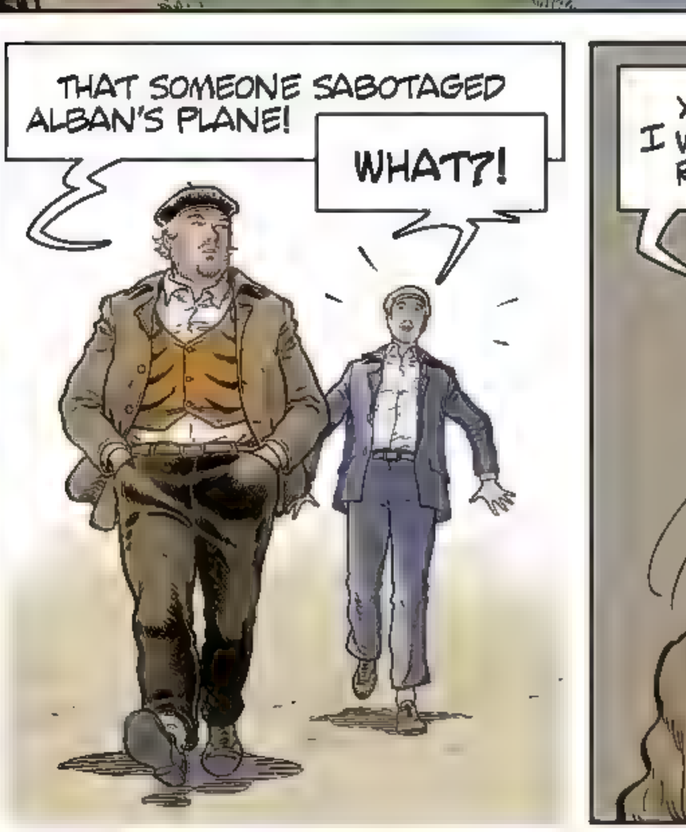

WHY THE HELL WOULD I BE OK?

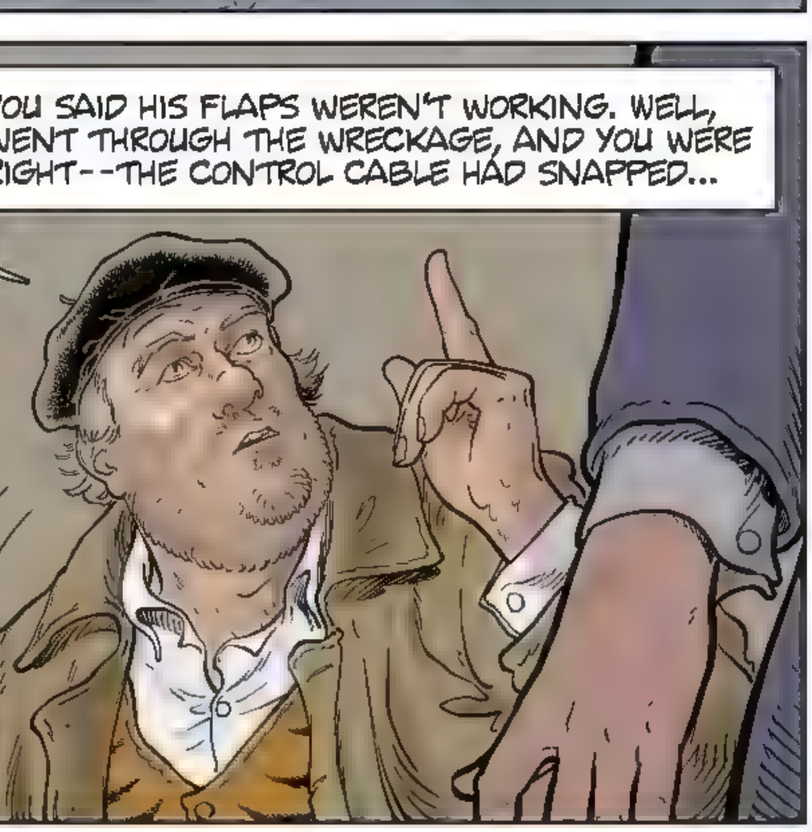

I WATCHED THEM BOTH DIE, OSCAR!!
KARMINA TOSSED AWAY LIKE A RAG DOLL, AND ALBAN SMASHED TO BITS WITH HIS PLANE.

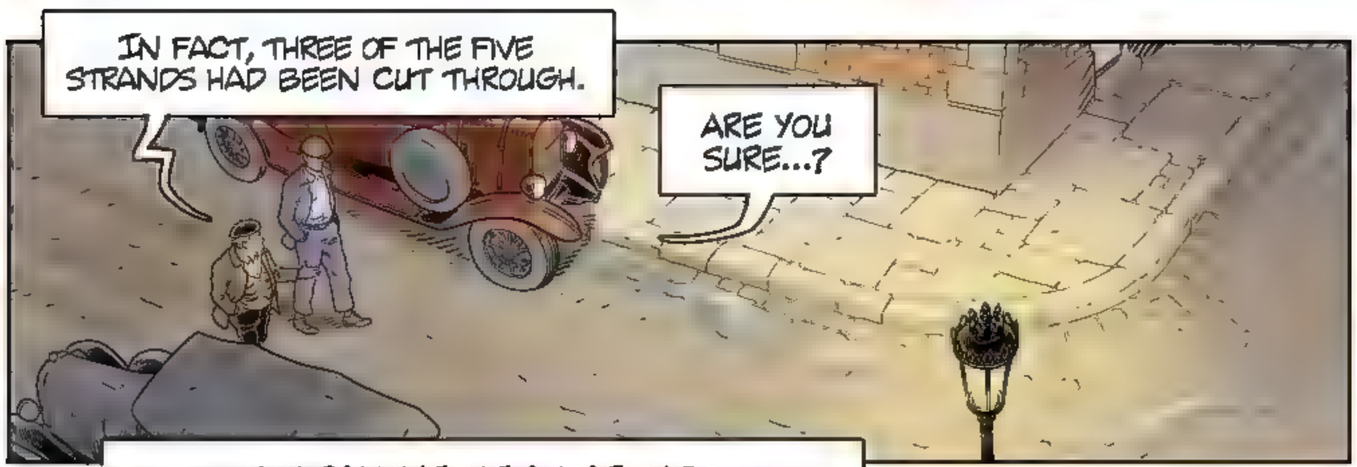
I KNOW, KID, I KNOW.
GET YOUR MIND OFF IT IF YOU WANT TO DO THIS JOB. OR QUIT!


IN ANY CASE, THE FLYING TIGERS ARE FINISHED. BONY WON'T RECOVER FROM THIS KIND OF DISASTER.
I'M GOING BACK TO ADÈLE'S.
HMM... BONY...

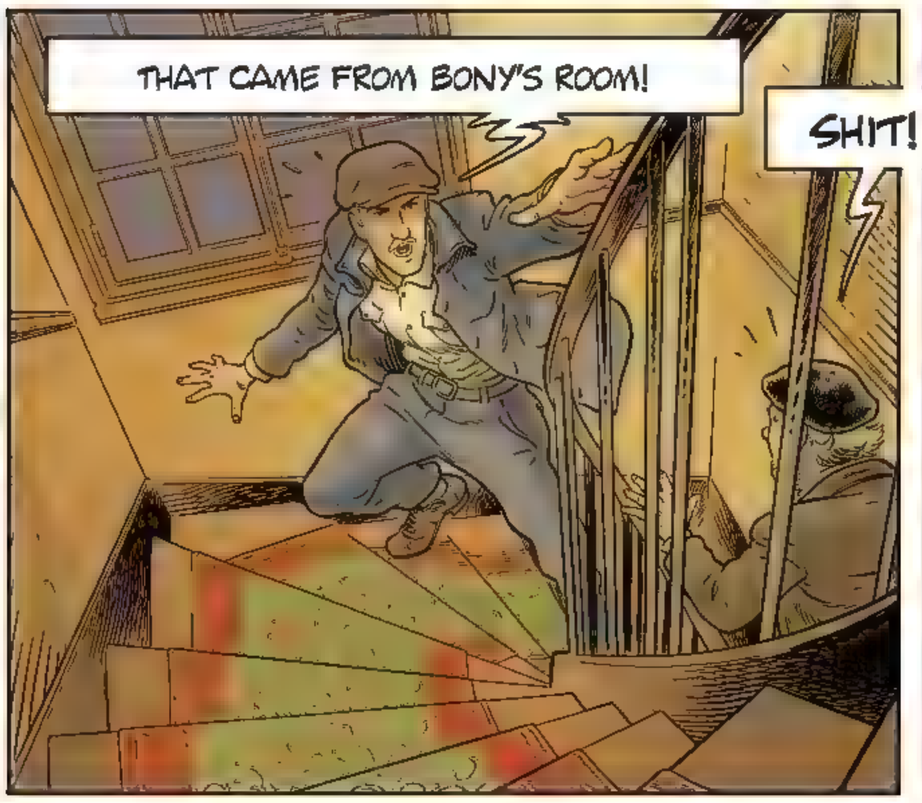
I WANT A WORD WITH HIM! C'MON, LET'S GO!
?!
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO SAY TO HIM?

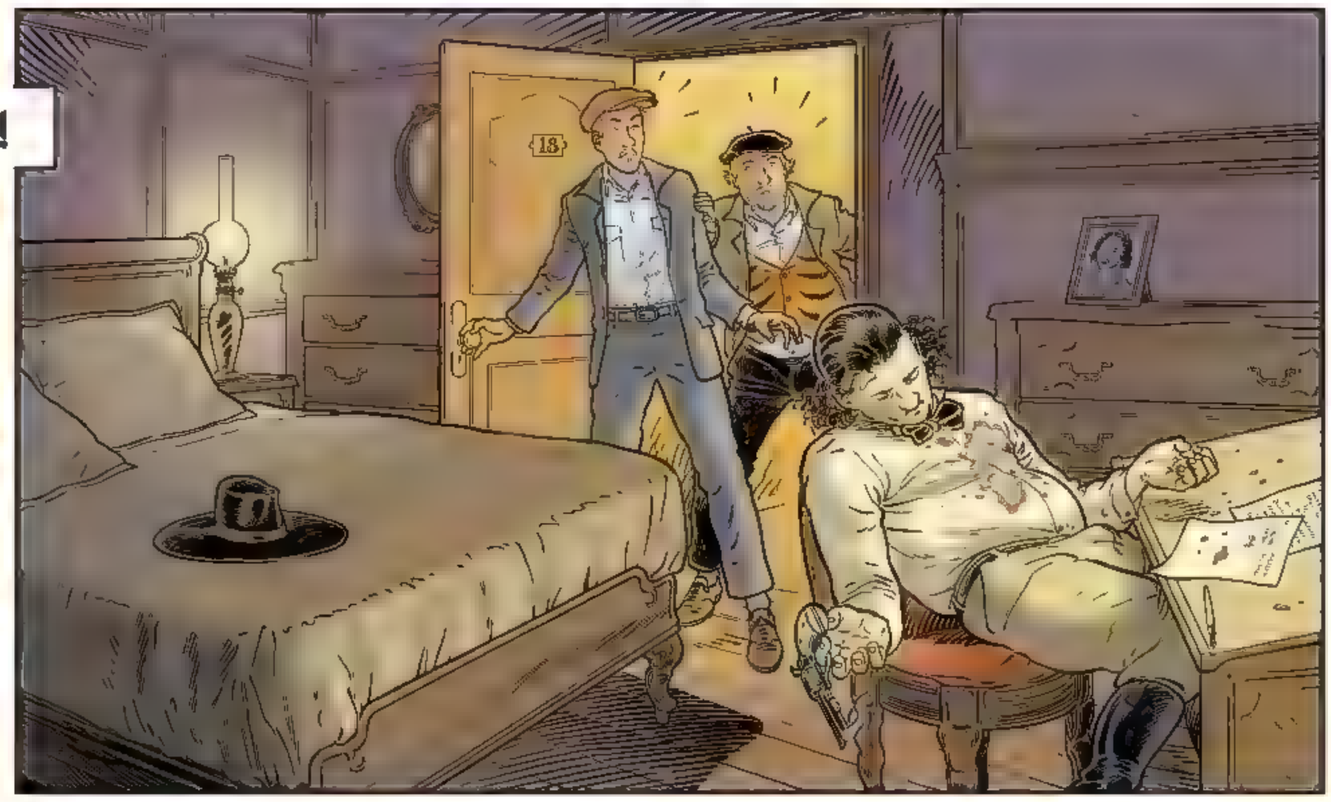

THAT SOMEONE SABOTAGED ALBAN'S PLANE!
WHAT?!


YOU SAID HIS FLAPS WEREN'T WORKING. WELL, I WENT THROUGH THE WRECKAGE, AND YOU WERE RIGHT--THE CONTROL CABLE HAD SNAPPED...

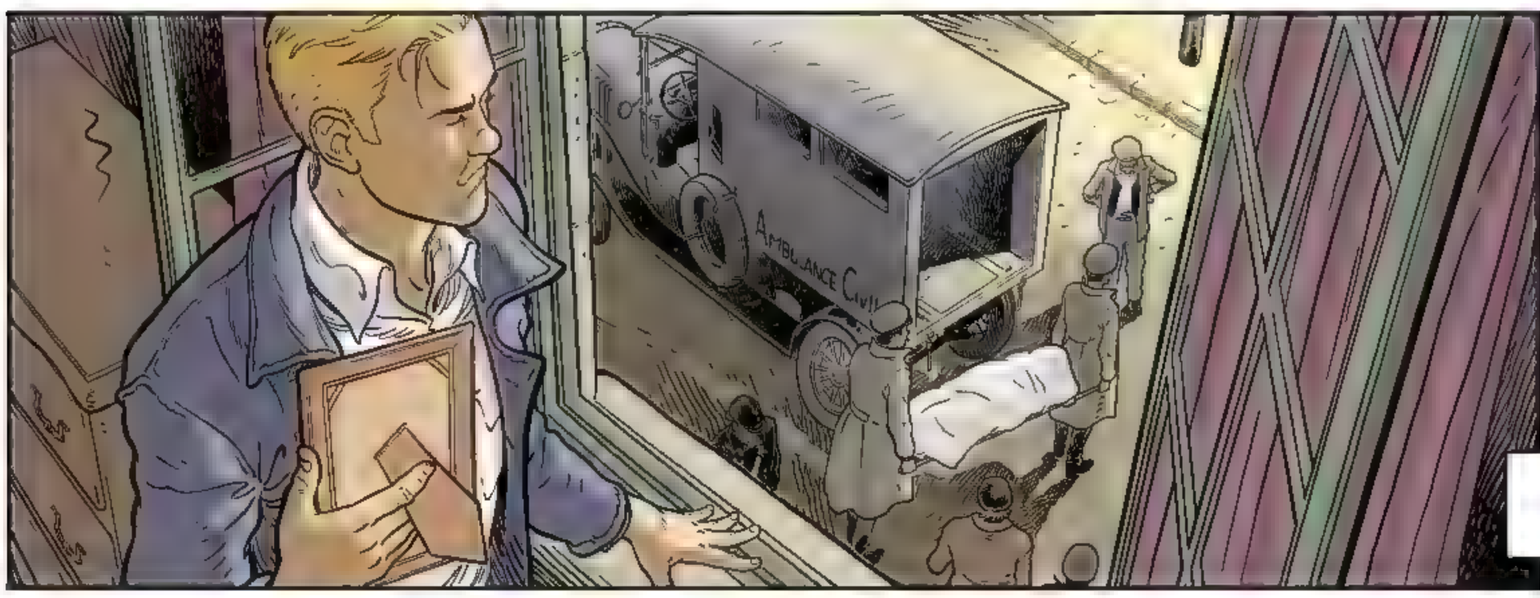


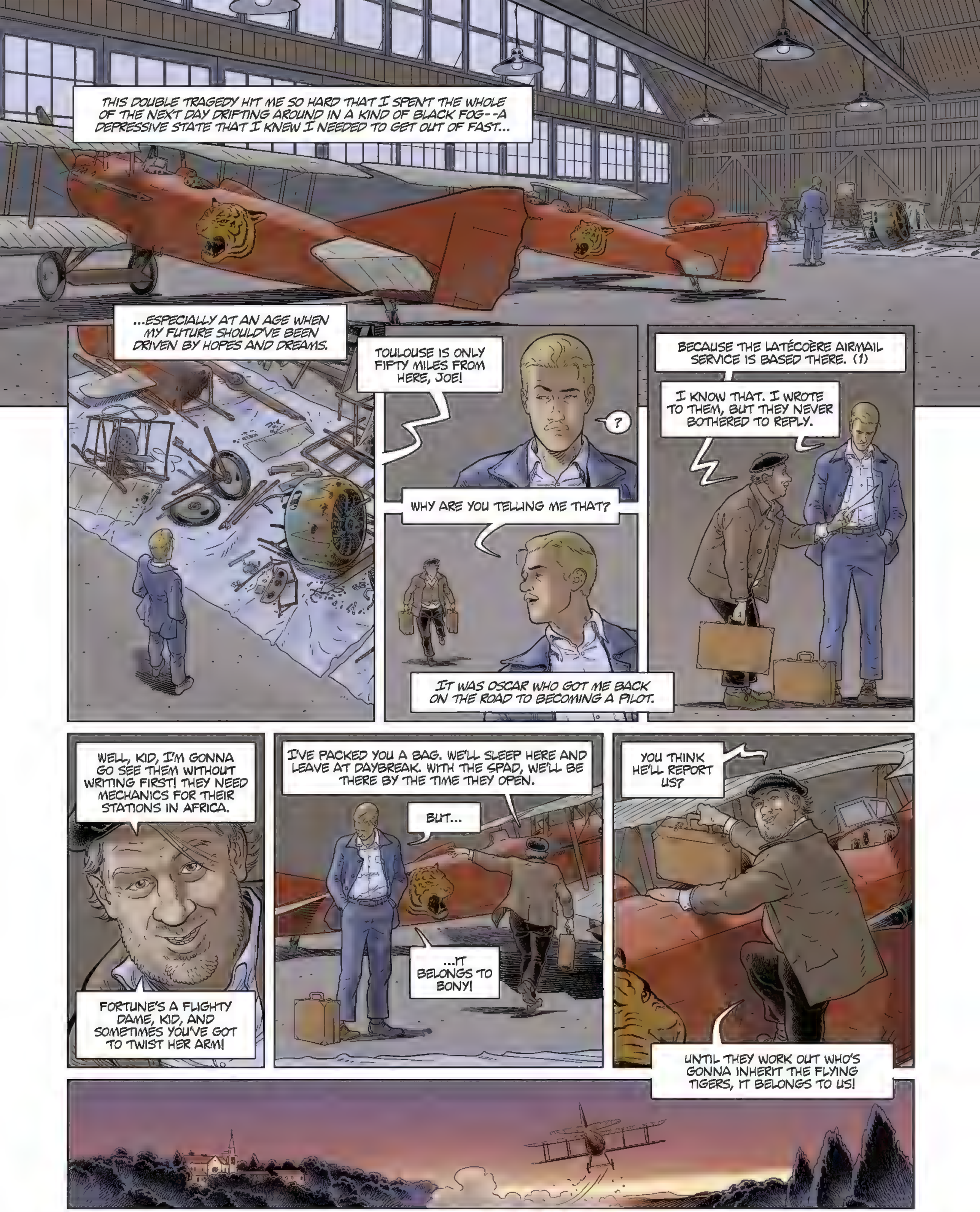
DID YOU SEE THE IDIOTS THEY SENT OVER? THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BE WORKING ON A SUNDAY! THEY WERE ALL TOO HAPPY TO REPORT IT AS AN ACCIDENT.





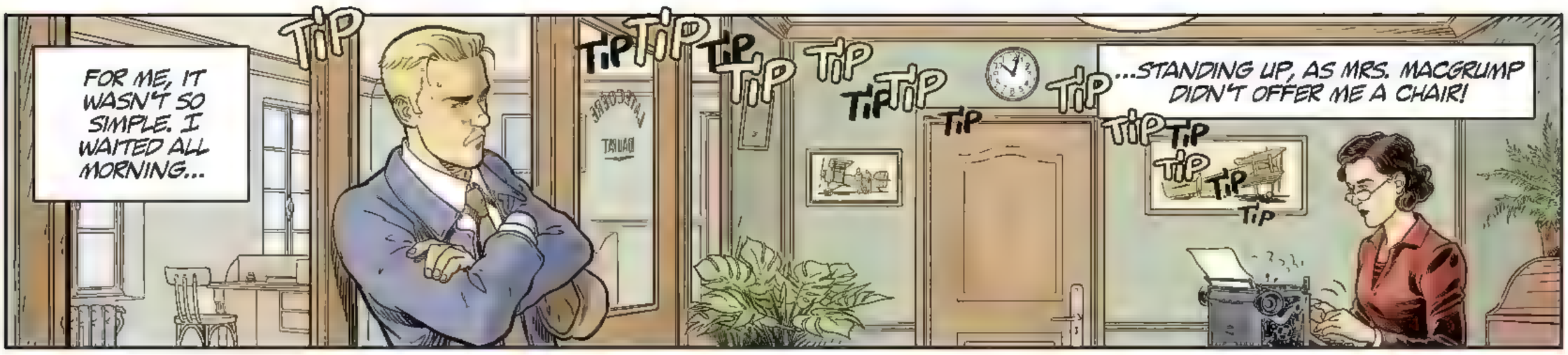
THE LETTER CONFIRMED EVERYTHING. THAT IT WAS BONY WHO'D SABOTAGED ALBAN'S PLANE. THAT HE'D FOUND OUT THAT KARMINA WAS SLEEPING WITH ALBAN. THAT HE MIGHT HAVE ACCEPTED IT IF SHE HADN'T TOLD HIM THAT SHE AND HER LOVER WERE LEAVING AT THE END OF THE SEASON.



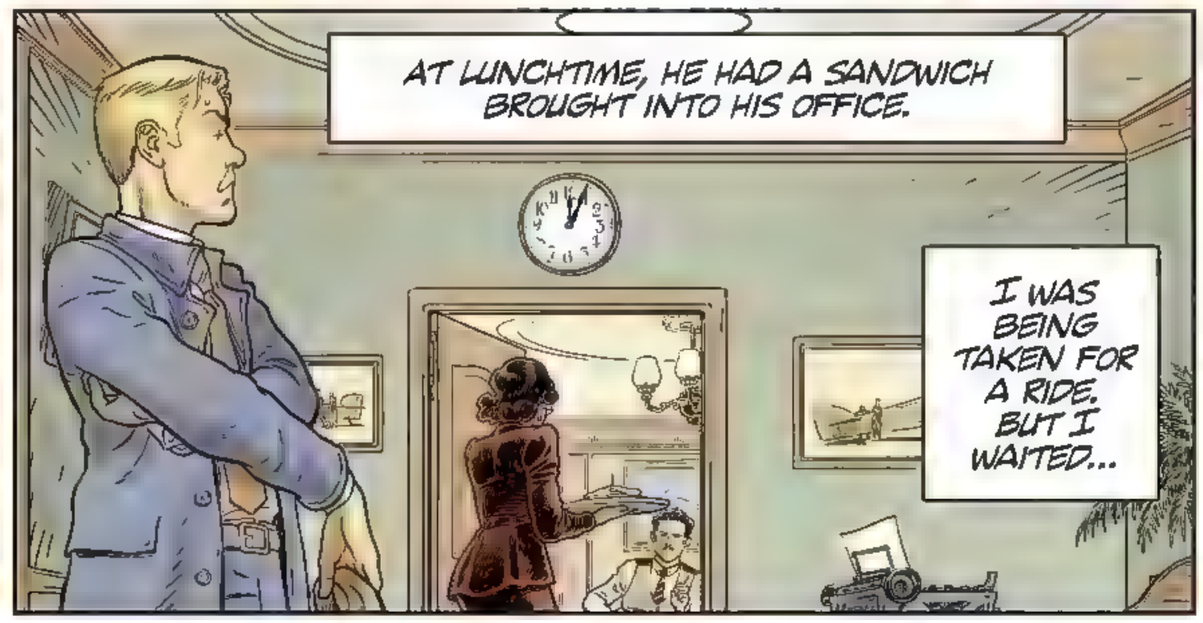


(1) AT NEARBY MONTAUDRAN.

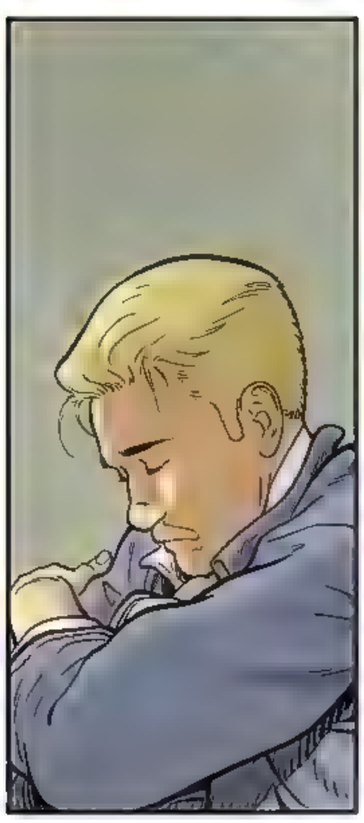
TWO RECRUITMENT LETTERS?! BUT I NEVER RECEIVED ANYTHING!
THEY WERE SENT TO MADAME ADÈLE BOUVIER AT AN ADDRESS IN BRÉTIGNY-SUR-ORGE. THAT WAS WHERE YOU ASKED FOR CORRESPONDENCE TO BE SENT, WASN'T IT?
YES, BUT...
THE BITCH! SHE DIDN'T TELL ME!
UH... I WAS ON TOUR WITH THE TIGERS. SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO LET ME KNOW, BUT OBVIOUSLY...
THAT'S BAD LUCK FOR YOU, BECAUSE MR. DAURAT HAS NOW ENGAGED OTHER PILOTS.
THAT'S... THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE. I...
I'D LIKE TO SEE MR. DAURAT, PLEASE!
YOU NEED AN APPOINTMENT.
?
WELL, MAKE ME AN APPOINTMENT FOR TODAY! I'LL WAIT.
IF YOU WISH.
OSCAR LETHELLIER... HMM... YOU HAVE GOOD REFERENCES...
GO TO HANGAR B. ASK FOR THE WORKSHOP MANAGER. IT'S UP TO HIM.

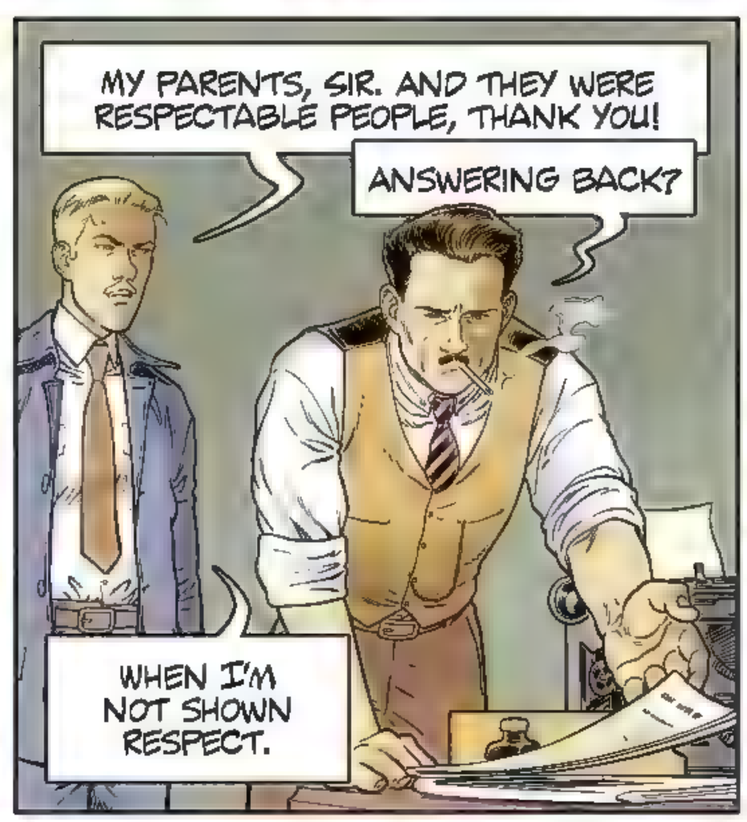


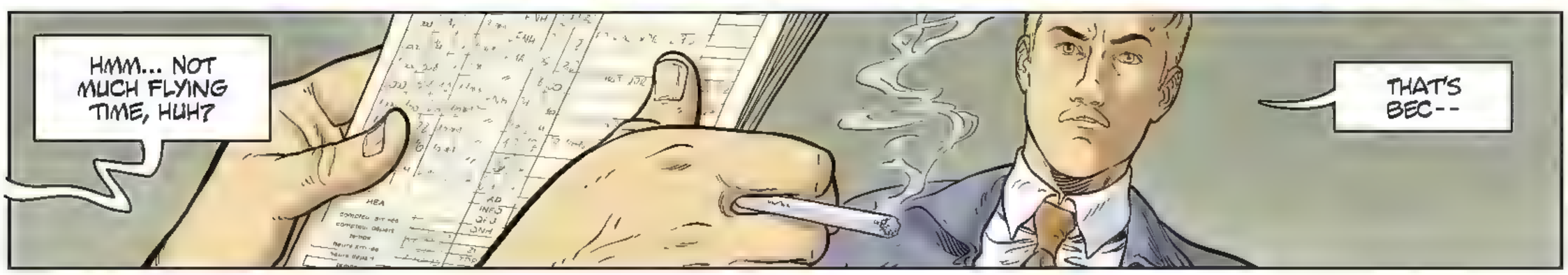
A GUY I ASSUMED TO BE MR. DAURAT CAME INTO THE ROOM SEVERAL TIMES AND TOTALLY IGNORED ME... AND HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE THE SORT OF GUY YOU'D BE EAGER TO SAY HI TO.

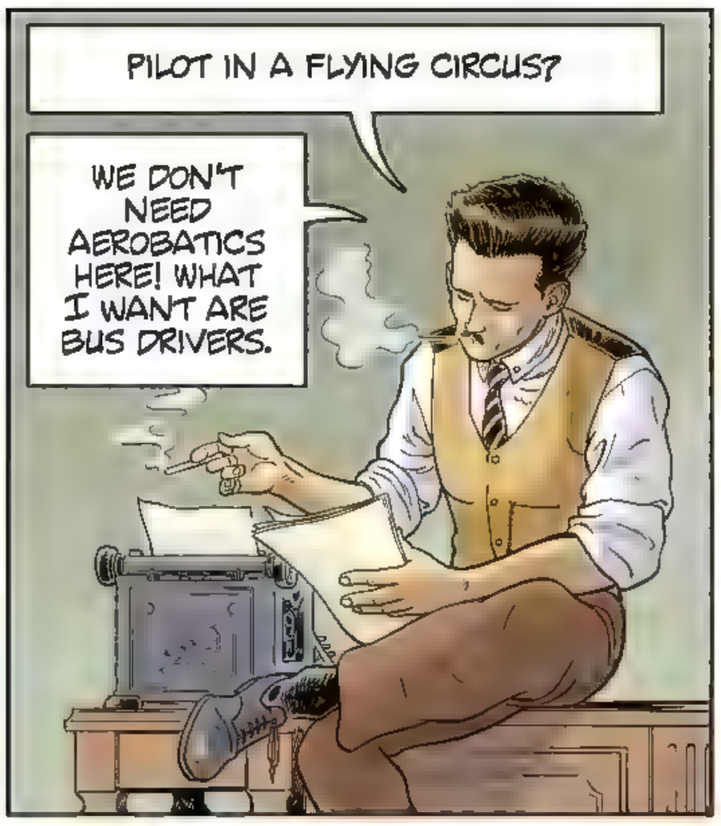


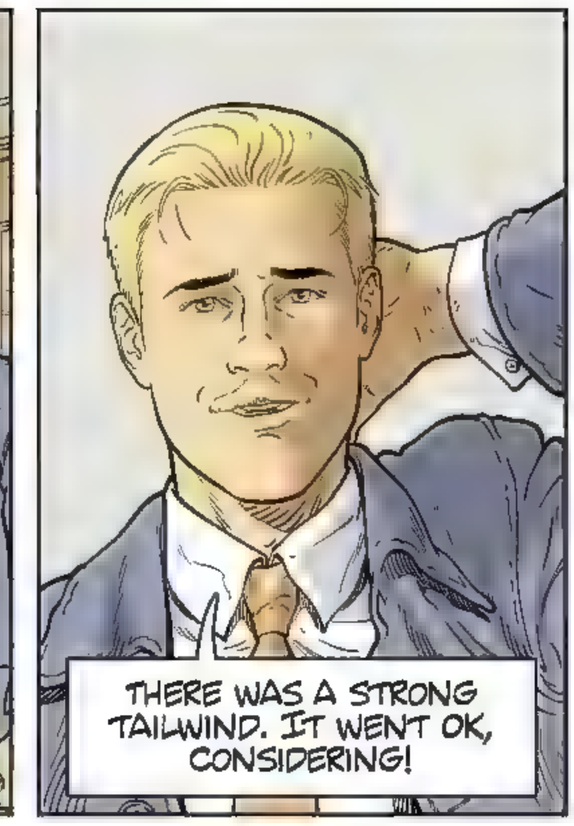
...STICKING IT OUT FOR THE WHOLE AFTERNOON LIKE A SENTRY ON DUTY. OSCAR CAME TO TELL ME THAT HE'D BEEN TAKEN ON AND THAT HE'D GET A ROOM FOR US BOTH AT A PLACE IN TOWN CALLED LE GRAND BALCON. I COULD GO FIND HIM THERE WHEN I WAS DONE.

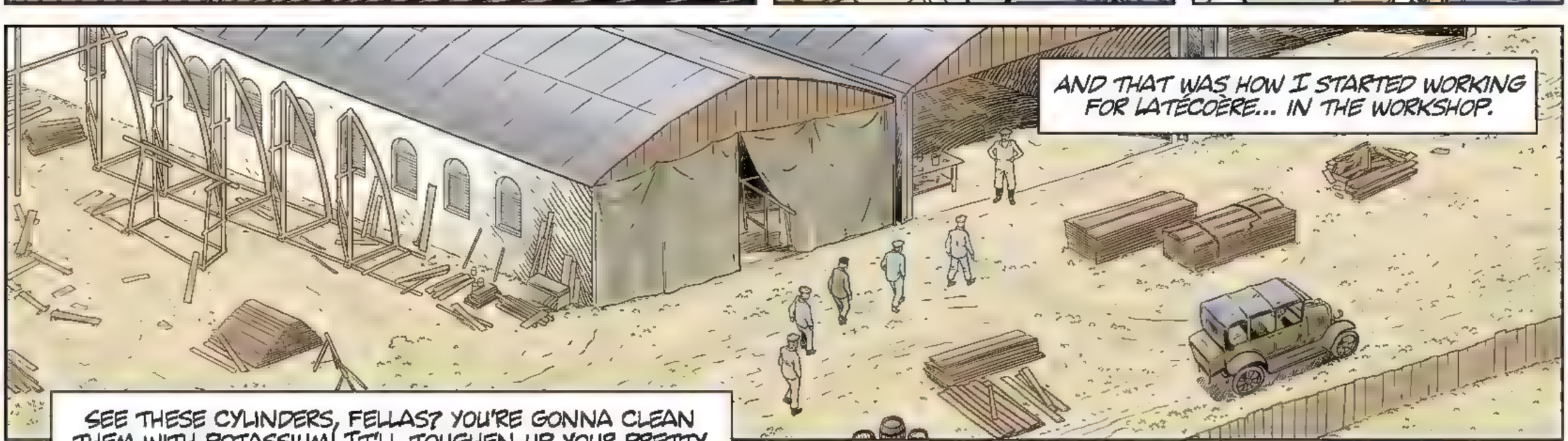


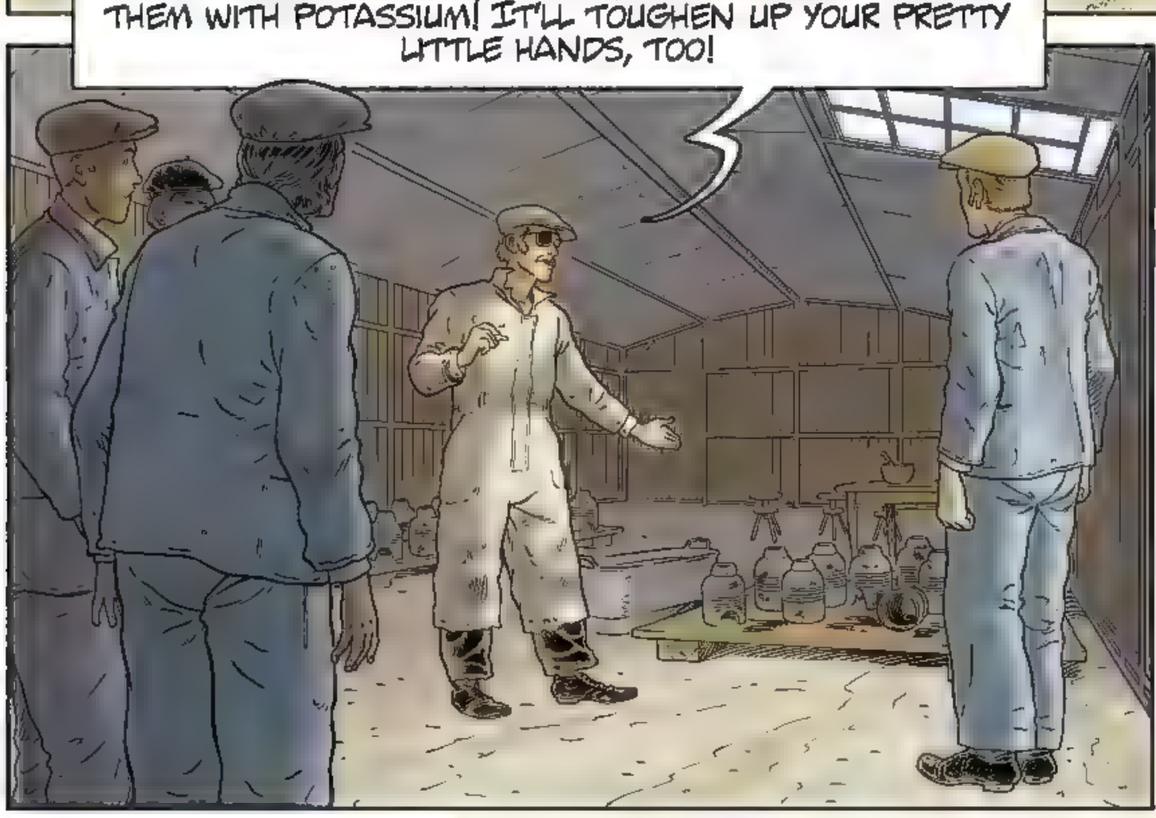




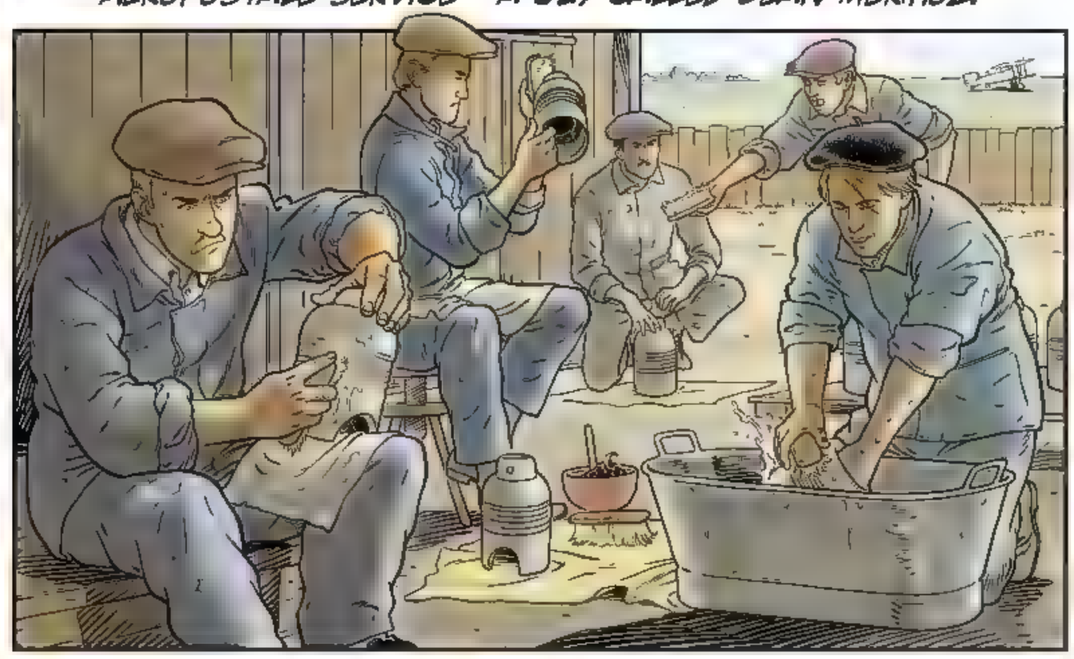


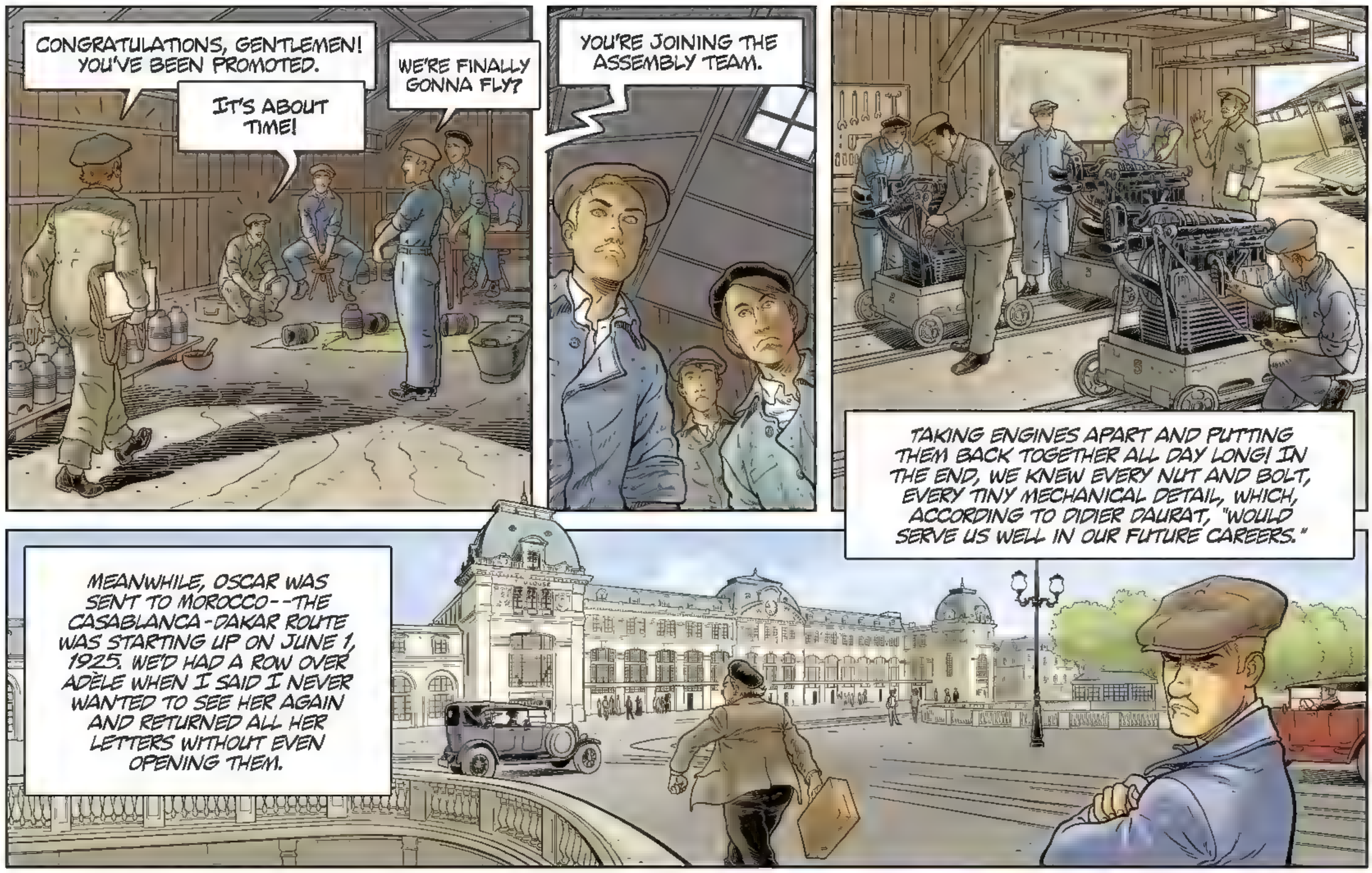


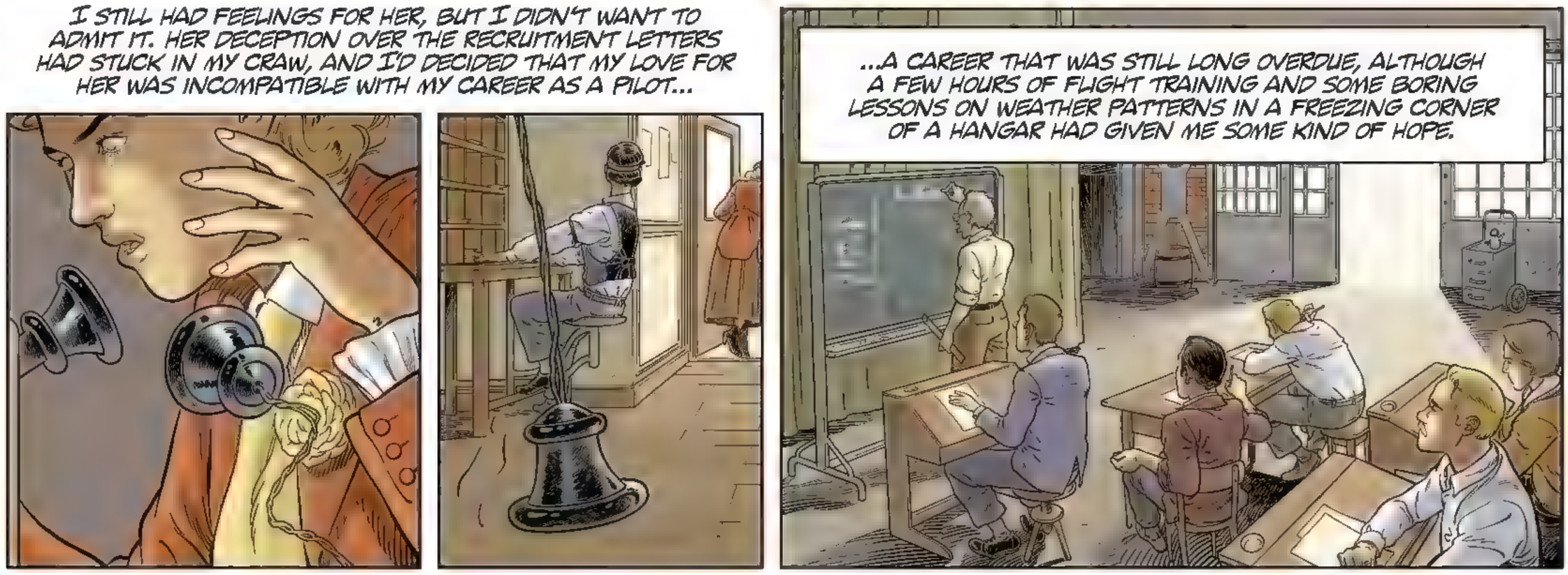




FOR TWO LONG MONTHS, I DID NOTHING BUT CLEAN CYLINDERS AND MORE CYLINDERS WITH FOUR OTHER YOUNG WANNABE PILOTS, INCLUDING A FUTURE LEGEND OF THE AÉROPOSTALE SERVICE--A GUY CALLED JEAN MERMOZ.



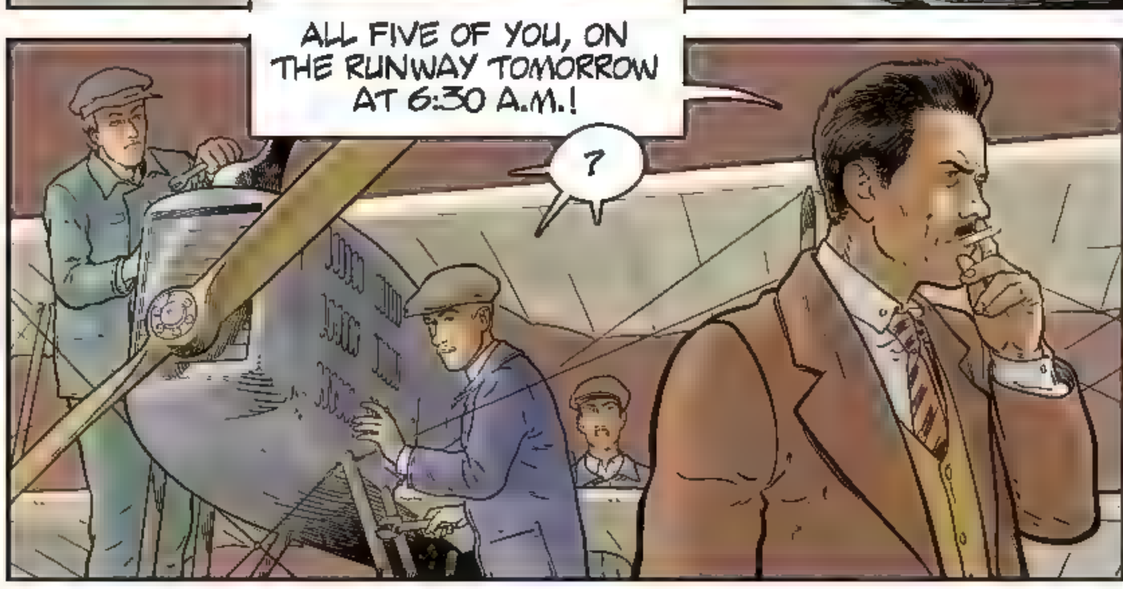




FOR ME AND THE OTHERS, THIS LONG APPRENTICESHIP--PUTTING PLANES TOGETHER IN THE WORKSHOP, AND LISTENING TO THE REAL PILOTS AT LE GRAND BALCON RECOUNTING THEIR ADVENTURES IN AFRICA--WAS, AGAIN ACCORDING TO DIDIER DAURAT, "A NECESSARY INCUBATION PERIOD TO ABSORB THE SPIRIT OF LATÉCOÈRE AND CONVERT TO THE RELIGION OF THE AIRMAIL SERVICE."

NAMELY THAT THE MAIL WAS SACROSANCT, AND MUST BE DELIVERED ON TIME WHATEVER THE WEATHER! WE'D SOMETIMES HEAR THAT A PILOT HAD SADLY CRASHED IN THE PYRENEES OR THE SIERRA NEVADA... (1)

...BUT EVEN THIS DIDN'T DULL OUR ENTHUSIASM. IN FACT, WE WERE SO FULL OF OURSELVES THAT WE SAW IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE HIS PLACE.



(1) MEANING "SNOW-CLAD RANGE" IN SPANISH, IT TOPS OUT AT OVER 11,000 FT.

I WAS THE FIRST TO GO UP. AN OLD HAND WHO KNEW I'D FLOWN WITH THE TIGERS HAD WARNED ME NOT TO DO ANY AEROBATICS--"MR. SIBERIA" HATED THAT. TWO MONTHS EARLIER, MERMOZ HAD TRIED TO IMPRESS HIM WITH SOME STUNTS AND WAS ALMOST FIRED ON THE SPOT.

SO I SIMPLY CLIMBED TO 700 FEET, MADE A SMOOTH TURN DESPITE THE GUSTY WIND, AND FLEW STRAIGHT BACK, KEEPING HER LEVEL AND TOUCHING DOWN RIGHT AT THE END OF THE RUNWAY...

...."LIKE A BUS DRIVER," JUST THE WAY HE WANTED!

JOSEF SCHÄFER, PASSED!

BUT IF ANYONE LET THEIR NERVES SHOW BY FLYING UNEVENLY OR HESITANTLY, THE BIG BOSS WAS MERCILESS IN HIS CONDEMNATION.

VINCENT DE MANNEUR, FAILED.

BUT I--

I JUST SAVED YOUR LIFE, YOUNG MAN. YOU NEED NERVES OF STEEL TO SURVIVE A STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS. FIND ANOTHER CAREER...

...OR ANOTHER AIRLINE!

NEXT!

THE VERY NEXT MORNING, I TOOK THE MAIL TO BARCELONA IN A STURDY OLD BREGUET XIV. I WAS TO OPERATE THE BARCELONA-MALAGA LEG WITH TWO OTHER PILOTS. AND WHAT A LEG IT WAS! OVER 600 MILES--SEVEN HOURS' FLYING IF THE WEATHER WAS KIND. AND IF IT WASN'T, YOU NEVER KNEW HOW LONG IT MIGHT TAKE.

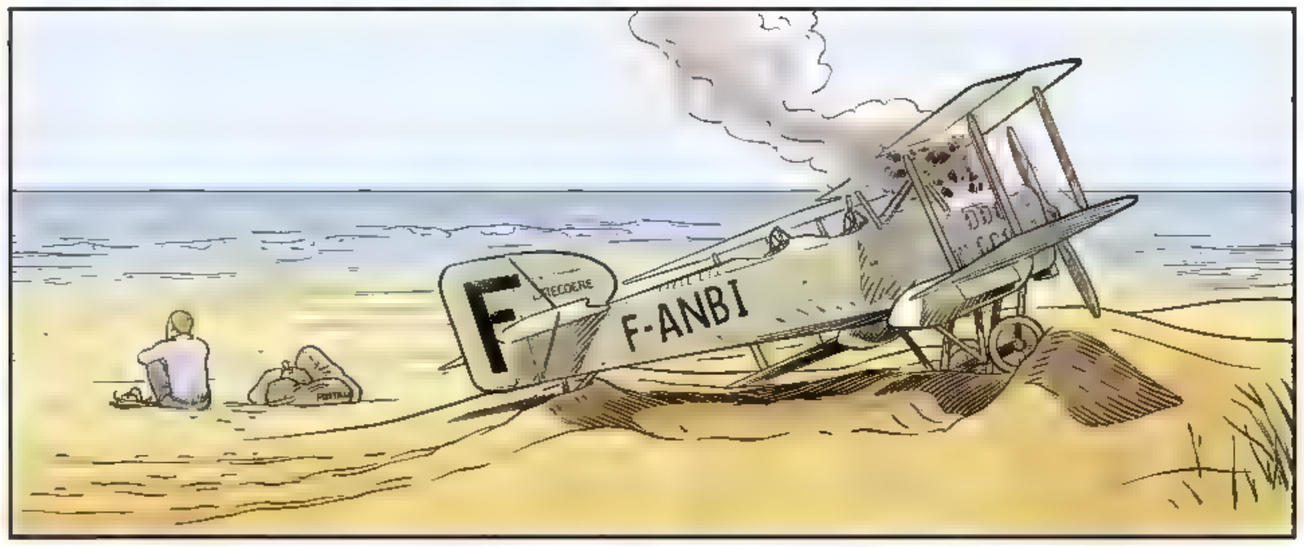
WE'D FLY ALONG THE COAST AS FAR AS ALICANTE, THEN CUT ACROSS THE SIERRA NEVADA TO MALAGA. ONE WRONG COMPASS BEARING, AND WE MIGHT SMASH INTO A STRAY PEAK. WE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH FUEL TO GO AROUND THE MOUNTAINS, AND THE BREGUET XIV WASN'T POWERFUL ENOUGH TO FLY ABOVE STORMS.

SO IT BECAME A PHYSICAL STRUGGLE WITH THE ELEMENTS--CONSTANTLY CORRECTING THE SUDDEN RISING AND FALLING OF THE AIRPLANE, KEEPING AN EYE ON ALL OF THE INSTRUMENTS, AND NOT LOSING SIGHT OF THE COASTLINE, OUR PATH TO SALVATION.

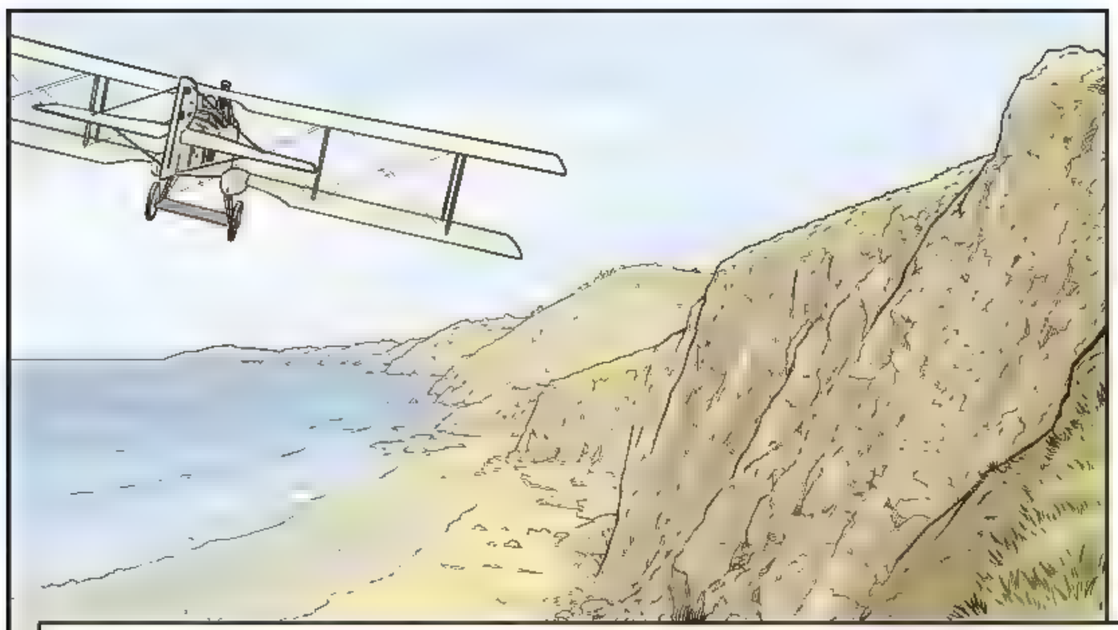
AS SOON AS WE LANDED IN MALAGA, WE HAD TO TRANSFER THE MAIL TO ANOTHER PLANE--ITS ENGINE ALREADY RUNNING--TO BE TAKEN ON TO MOROCCO.

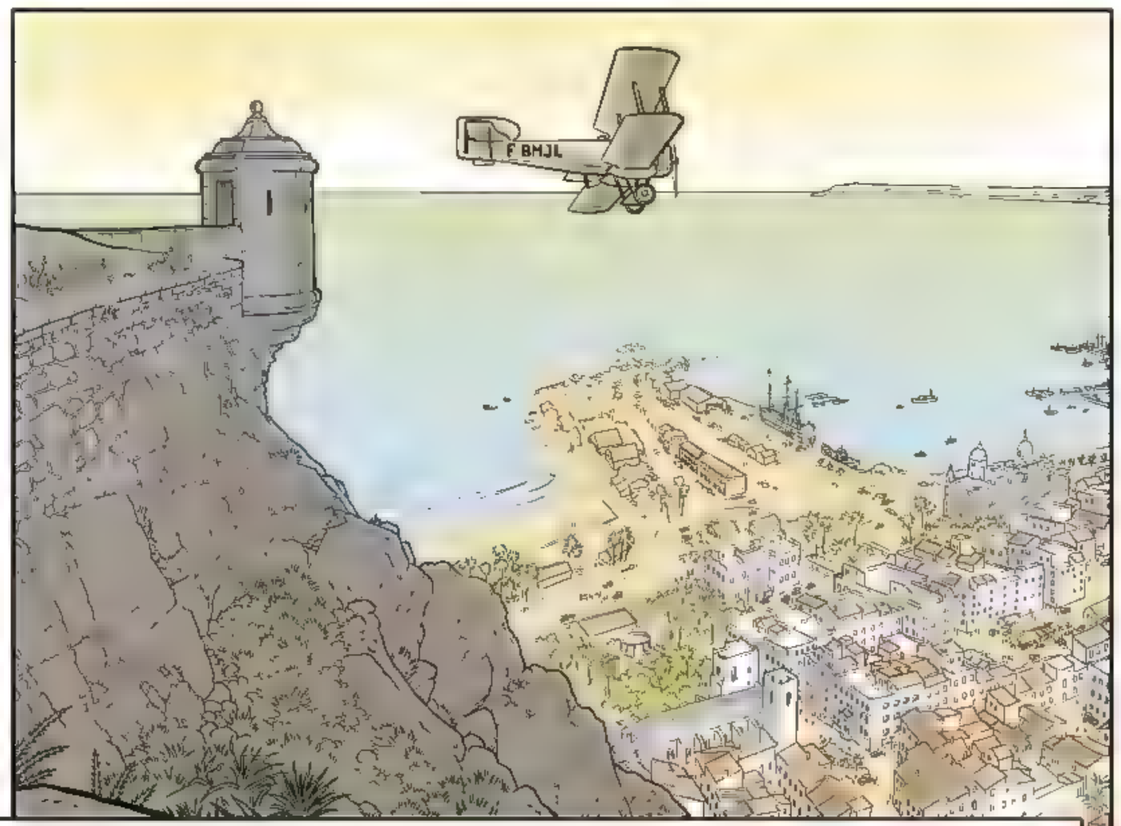
I LEARNED TO IDENTIFY EVERY LANDMARK ALONG THE ROUTE--RIVERS, BOULDERS, FARMS--AS WELL AS PLACES TO LAND IF THE ENGINE CONKED OUT... WHICH IT DID OFTEN, HAVING BEEN PATCHED UP SO MANY TIMES.

THIS MADE ME WONDER ABOUT THE WAY THE BUSINESS WORLD WAS RUN. HERE I WAS IN 1925, HAVING SPENT MONTHS BUILDING BRAND NEW PLANES FOR LATÉCOÈRE, NOW FULFILLING THE GREAT DREAM OF LINKING THE CONTINENTS IN A MACHINE THAT HAD BEEN DESIGNED BEFORE THE GREAT WAR!



BUT THE MAIL HAD TO BE DELIVERED, SOMETIMES ALONG WITH A PASSENGER OR TWO SQUATTING NERVOUSLY AMONG THE SACKS. SO I WENT ON RISKING MY LIFE BECAUSE I LOVED FLYING, AND IN THE END I WAS HAPPY TO HAVE CONVERTED MY PRIMITIVE INSTINCTS INTO WHAT I TOOK TO BE A NOBLE ENTERPRISE.





MY THIRST FOR ADVENTURE THEN DREW ME TO THE CASABLANCA-DAKAR ROUTE, WHICH HAD OPENED SOME MONTHS EARLIER. I KNEW THAT DAURAT WAS LOOKING FOR NEW PILOTS TO MAKE UP THE LOSSES THAT ILLNESS, MARAUDING BEDOUIN, OR THE DESERT ITSELF HAD ALREADY CAUSED IN AFRICA. BUT SO FAR HE'D REJECTED MY APPLICATIONS.

ONE DAY, I ARRIVED IN ALICANTE AFTER A DIFFICULT FLIGHT. FOR ONCE, I WAS TO STAY PUT.

ANOTHER PILOT, WHO WAS BASED IN AFRICA, WOULD BE TAKING MY PLANE ON TO MALAGA AND THE NEXT DAY TO MOROCCO.

AS IT HAPPENED, I WASN'T TOO UNHAPPY ABOUT THE CHANGE OF ROUTINE.

NICE LANDING, MR. SCHÄFER!

THANKS, JUANJO!

THERE'S NO WAY I CAN TAKE OFF IN THIS WEATHER!

YES...

...YOU CAN!

YOU KNOW THE RULES, DON'T YOU?

YOU'RE NOT THE ONE RISKING YOUR LIFE!

I RISKED IT IN MY DAY...

FOR THE MAIL, I KNOW! BUT IT CAN WAIT A DAY, CAN'T IT?!

?

?!

THE WORLD WON'T COME TO AN END! PEOPLE WILL STILL GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS, RIGHT?!

I SEE! SO YOU GET TO DECIDE HOW THE WORLD SHOULD BE RUN NOW, DO YOU?

MADRID

UH... N-NO...

...BUT I DECIDE WHETHER I LIVE OR DIE.

WELL, NO ONE'S FORCING YOU.

I'M TOLD THE WIND'S GONNA DROP IN MALAGA.

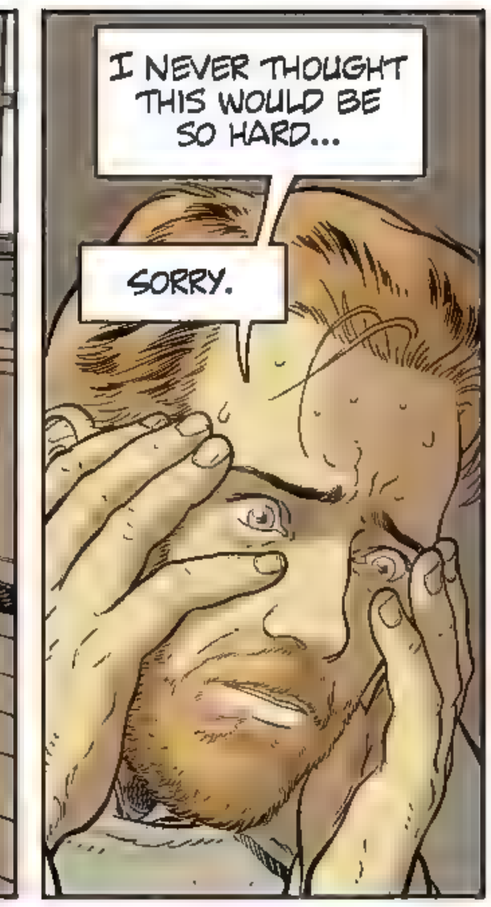
OCEAN ATLANTIQUE

AND IF IT DOESN'T?

IT'S NOT THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE RUN INTO A HEADWIND, IS IT? AND YOU'VE SURVIVED SO FAR...
WHAT'S UP, LEON? YOU OK?

YEAH. BUT LAST TIME...
I...

I THOUGHT I WAS A GONER!


I NEVER THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE SO HARD...
SORRY.

I JUST CAN'T DO IT ANYMORE!
I'M SORRY... I REALLY AM...

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'D SEEN A PILOT CRACK LIKE THAT.

OCEAN ATLANTIQUE
JOSEF?
HE WAS OFFERING ME THE MALAGA-MOROCCO ROUTE, BUT I WAS STILL REELING FROM LEON'S BREAKDOWN. I HESITATED, THOUGH I KNEW THAT SIGNING ON COULD TAKE ME WHERE I WANTED TO GO...
...OVER THE MEDITERRANEAN AND BEYOND.
PORTUGAL
Lisbonne

AND THAT WAS WHAT HAPPENED--ALTHOUGH I HAD TO SPEND OVER TWO MONTHS HOPPING BETWEEN MOROCCO AND ALGERIA BEFORE MY DREAM OF GRAND ADVENTURE BECAME A REALITY.
Cap Juby
MAROC MÉRIDIONAL
Zone espagnole
SAHARA
ESPAGNOL
Cap Bojador
MAURITANIE
POSTAL
21 AVR 1924
ALICANTE
POSTE

AT LAST! LEAVING TIZNIT BEHIND ME, I'D PASSED THE LAST OUTPOST OF THE CIVILIZED WORLD. I FINALLY FLEW OUT OVER THE DAZZLING HELL OF THE DESERT WHERE THE DISSIDENT SOUTH MOROCCAN ZONE BEGAN.

VROOOOOOO

THE OLD HANDS HAD TOLD ME, EXPLAINED TO ME, WARNED ME, BUT IT DIDN'T STOP ME BEING GRIPPED BY CONFUSING EMOTIONS...

VROOO

...AN ALMOST MORBID FASCINATION WITH THIS VAST EMPTINESS, ALLIED TO THE RAW FEAR OF FLYING OVER A LAND FILLED WITH DANGER IN AN UNPREDICTABLE METAL MACHINE...

PAW

FOLLOWING THE COASTLINE THAT STRETCHED FOR HUNDREDS OF MILES TOWARD MY DESTINATION, CAPE JUBY, THE HOURS OF FLIGHT FINALLY CALMED MY FEARS, LEAVING ME IN A MEDITATIVE STATE, A KIND OF POETIC DREAMWORLD.

F-GRGJ

F-AVMR

VROOOOOO

IT WAS THE ENGINE'S DISTURBING SPLUTTERING THAT BROUGHT ME BACK TO REALITY, REMINDING ME THAT HERE IN AFRICA WE HAD TO CONTEND WITH THE SAME BEAT-UP OLD BREGUETS THAT WE'D HAD IN SPAIN.

!?

PET PET... PET...

THE OLD CRATE WAS SUDDENLY LOSING SPEED.

PET PET... PET...

SCHEISSE! DON'T CONK OUT ON ME ON SUCH A NICE DAY!

?

WE'D JUST PASSED A GROUP OF FIERCE-LOOKING TRIBESMEN, AND I WASN'T TOO KEEN ON MEETING THEM FACE TO FACE.

HIMMEL! NOT EVEN A SANDY BEACH TO LAND ON!

HAVING ANOTHER PLANE WITH ME WAS LITTLE COMFORT, SINCE THE MAIL WAS IN THAT ONE--AND THE MAIL CAME FIRST!

GOTTA FIND OPEN GROUND FAST!

IF I WAS FORCED TO LAND, THE PILOT ACCOMPANYING ME WOULDN'T COME BACK TO RESCUE ME UNTIL HE'D SAFELY DELIVERED THE PRECIOUS MAILBAGS. THAT WAS THE RULE.

AND IF HIS PLANE WAS THE ONE THAT DIED, I'D HAVE TO LAND AND TRANSFER THE BAGS TO MINE. THAT WAS THE AIRMAIL SERVICE "RELIGION" THAT I'D SO DEVOUTLY CONVERTED TO! BELIEF DIDN'T MAKE YOU ANY LESS SCARED, THOUGH!

PET.... PET PET...

F-GRGJ

TOO ROCKY HERE! AND THE ENGINE'S COUGHING LIKE A CONSUMPTIVE!

MY ONLY CONSOLATION WAS THAT THE COMPANY REQUIRED US TO FLY WITH AN ARAB INTERPRETER. MOUYANE WAS ALL I HAD IN THE WAY OF LIFE INSURANCE...

PET TT... PET...

!?

VRRR

VRAOUM

WAS IT BECAUSE I'D THOUGHT OF MOUYANE? AFTER COUGHING AND SPLUTTERING LIKE IT WAS GIVING UP THE GHOST, THE ENGINE SUDDENLY SPRANG BACK TO LIFE, AS IF REJUVENATED.

YEAH! IT'S A MIRACLE!

OR SIMPLY A DIRTY FUEL LINE?

LET'S PULL HER UP NICE AND SLOW...

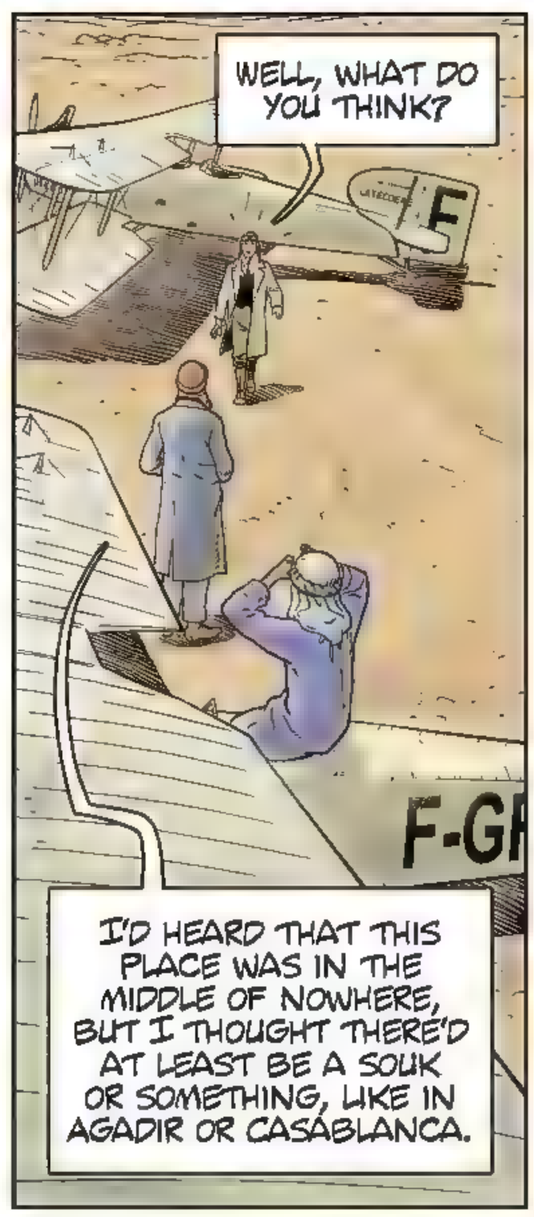
VROOO

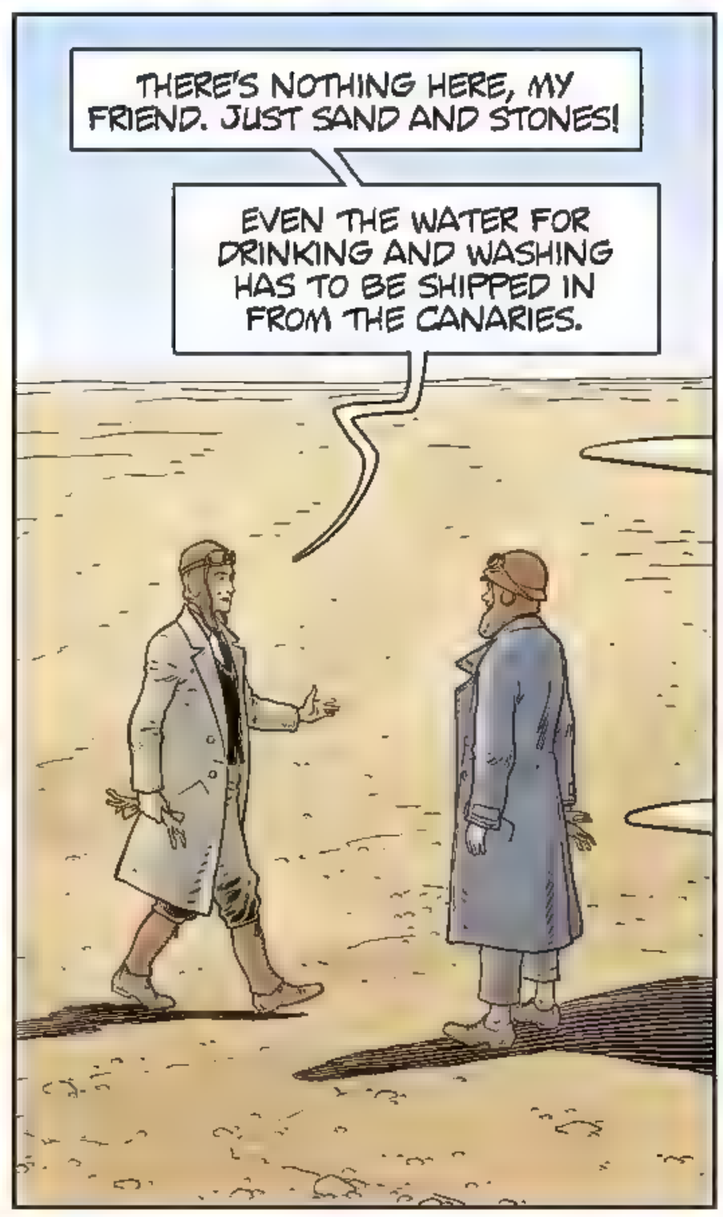
LIGNES AERIENNES LATECOERE

F-GRGJ

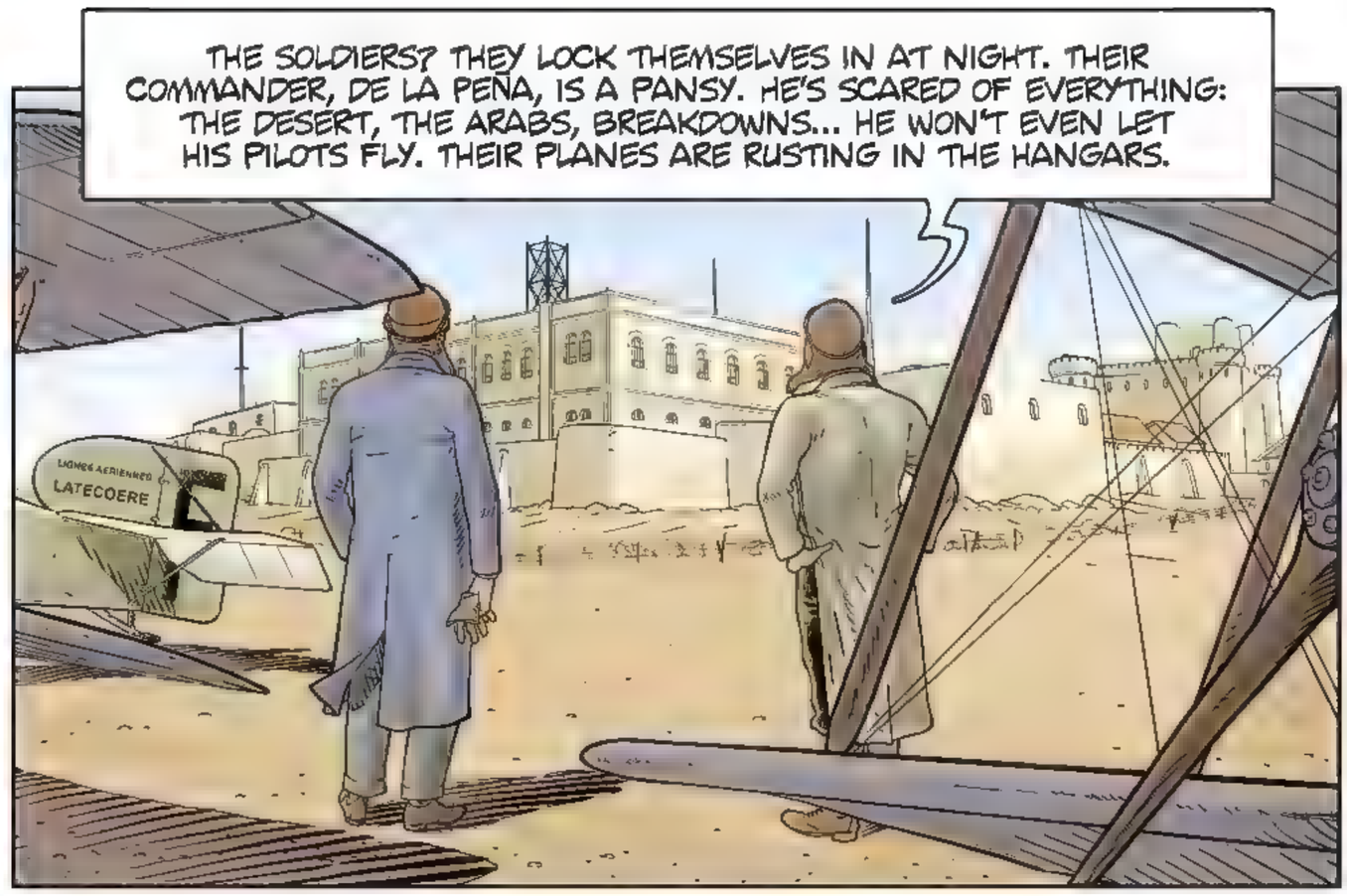
I'D BEEN WARNED ABOUT THE SPANISH GARRISON AT CAPE JUBY, TOO, BUT SEEING IT WAS STILL A SHOCK. BUILT RIGHT BY THE SEA, IT WAS ESSENTIALLY A MILITARY PRISON. BEYOND ITS SOUTHERN WALLS STRETCHED THE SPANISH PROVINCE OF RÍO DE ORO.

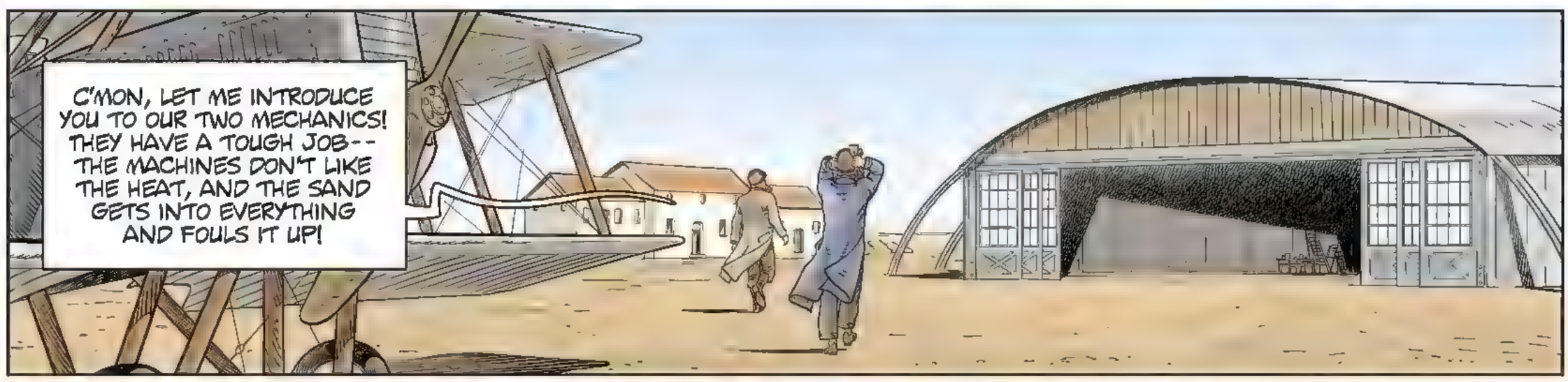
APART FROM THE RASH OF BEDOUIN TENTS THAT SEEMED TO HAVE SPRUNG FROM THE DUST OUTSIDE THE FORT, THE AREA WAS DESERTED AND GRIMLY SILENT.





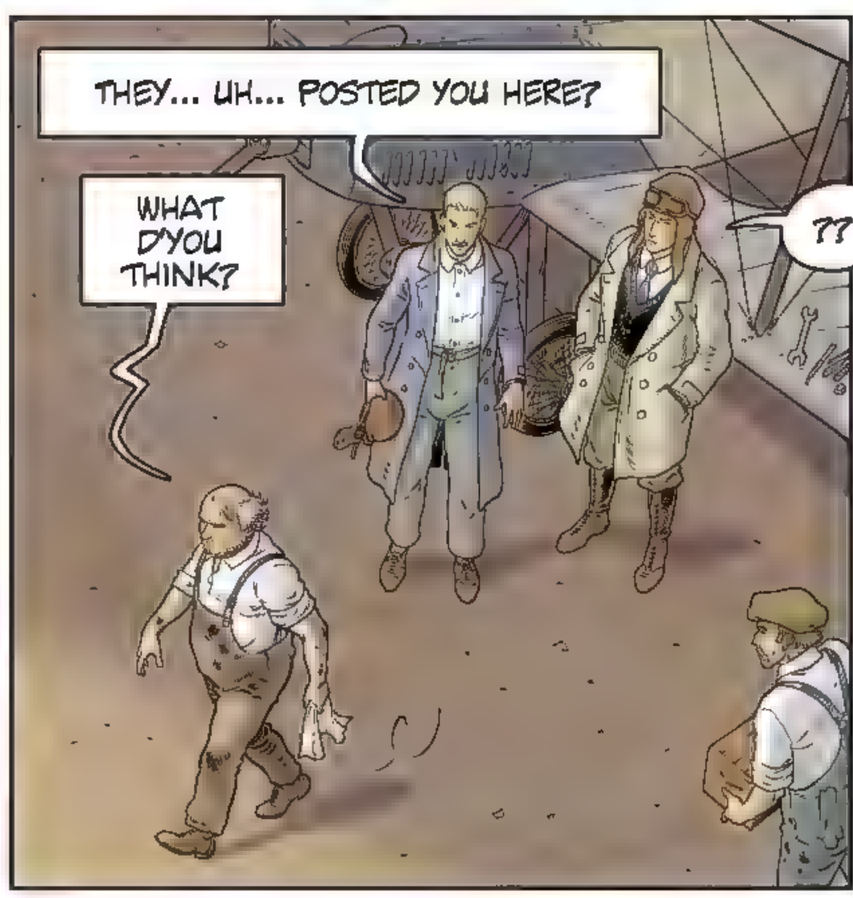
KEEP YOUR EYE ON THEM, ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT! THEY'LL PLUG YOU EVEN IF YOU'RE INSIDE THE FENCE.
AND THE SPANIARDS ALLOW THAT?!


THE SOLDIERS? THEY LOCK THEMSELVES IN AT NIGHT. THEIR COMMANDER, DE LA PEÑA, IS A PANSY. HE'S SCARED OF EVERYTHING: THE DESERT, THE ARABS, BREAKDOWNS... HE WON'T EVEN LET HIS PILOTS FLY. THEIR PLANES ARE RUSTING IN THE HANGARS.
LATECOERE

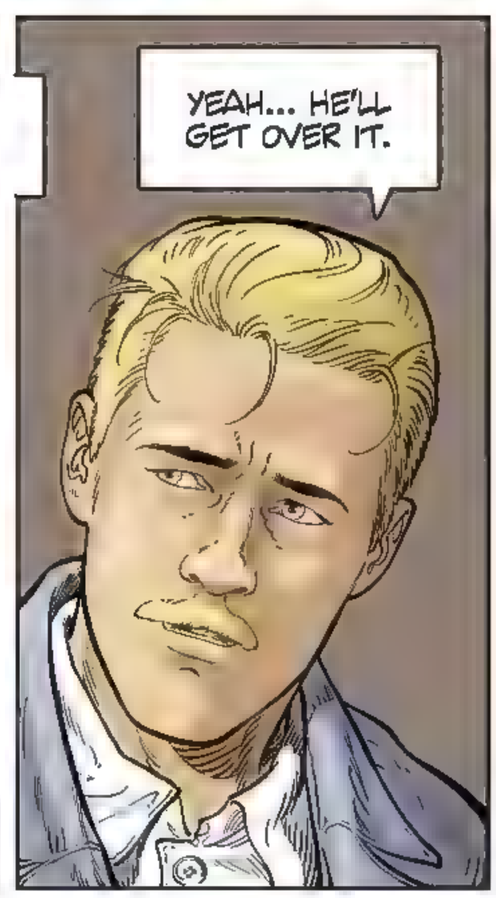

C'MON, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO OUR TWO MECHANICS! THEY HAVE A TOUGH JOB-- THE MACHINES DON'T LIKE THE HEAT, AND THE SAND GETS INTO EVERYTHING AND FOULS IT UP!

THEY'RE GOOD GUYS. I ALWAYS BRING THEM OUT A BOTTLE OF DECENT WINE OR SOME FRESH FOOD. AT CHRISTMAS, THEY GET A TURKEY... A LIVE ONE!

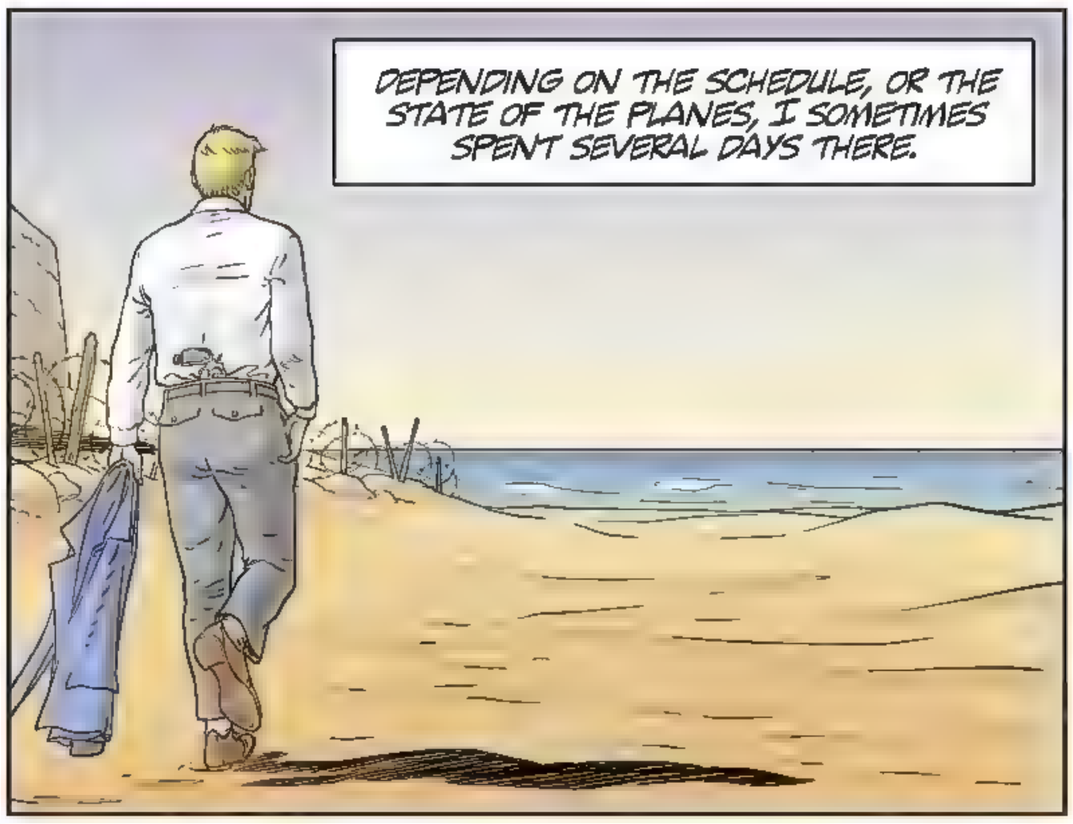
OSCAR?!
HUH, YOU MADE IT, THEN?

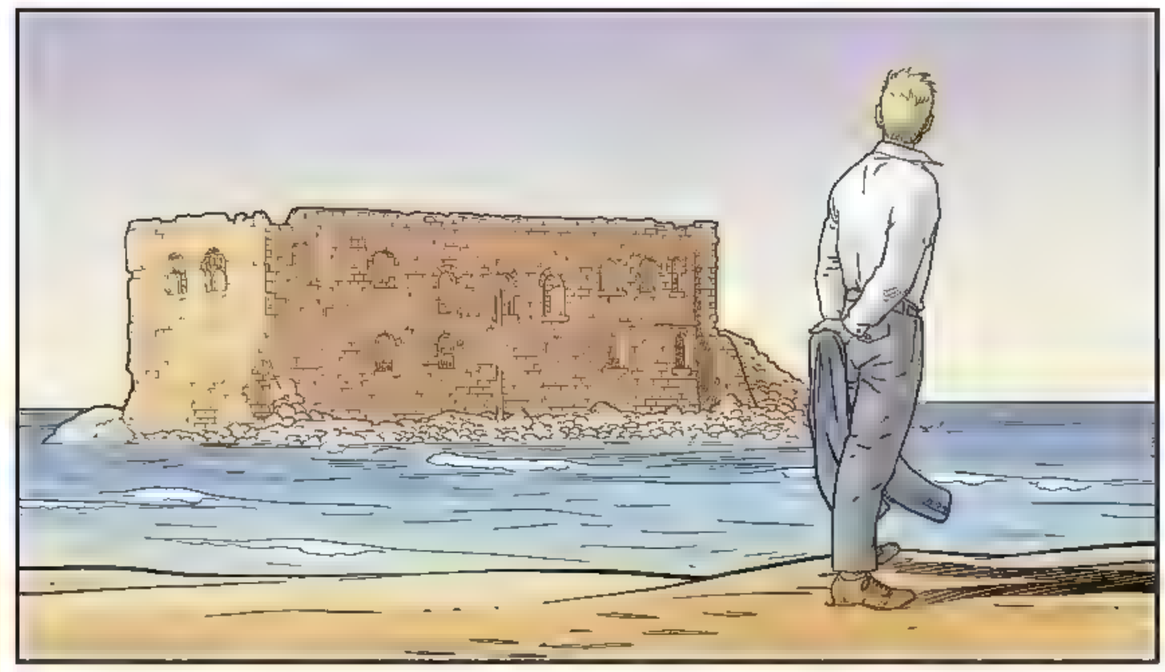

THEY... UH... POSTED YOU HERE?
WHAT D'YOU THINK?
??

THAT'S ODD... HE'S USUALLY THE LIFE AND SOUL.
YOU KNOW HIM?

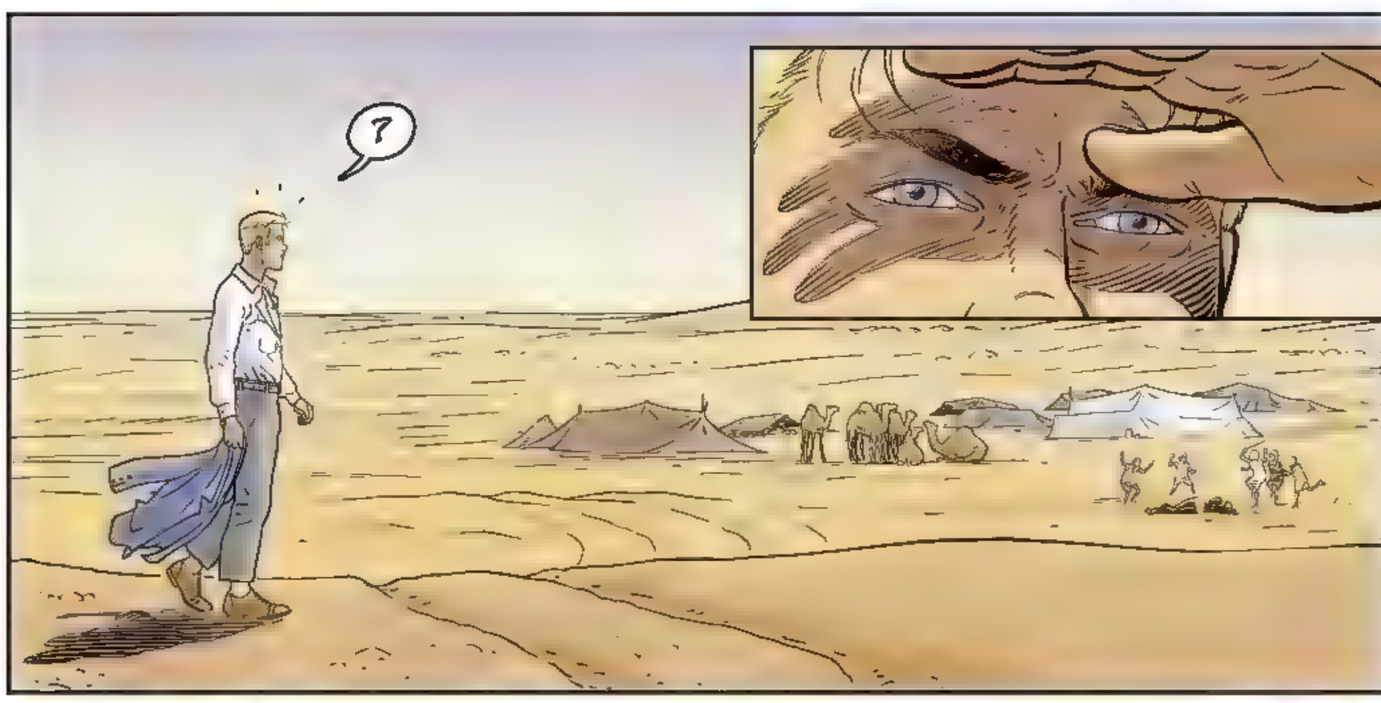

YEAH... HE'LL GET OVER IT.

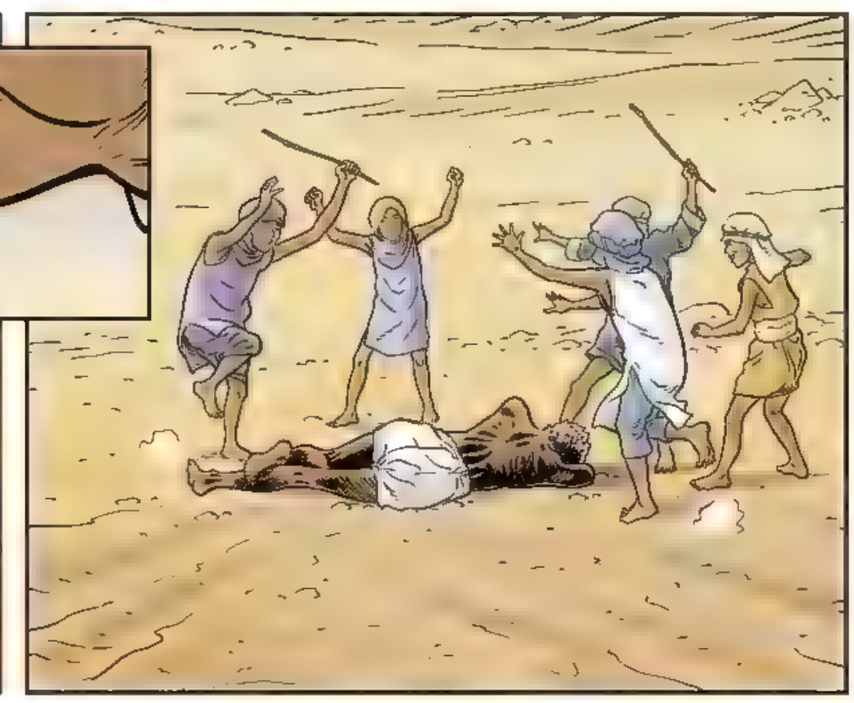
CAPE JUBY WAS A STAGING POST, EXACTLY HALFWAY BETWEEN CASABLANCA AND DAKAR. FOR ME, IT WAS INITIALLY THE END OF THE LINE. I TOOK THE MAIL THAT FAR DOWN, THEN TURNED AROUND AND TOOK IT BACK UP.

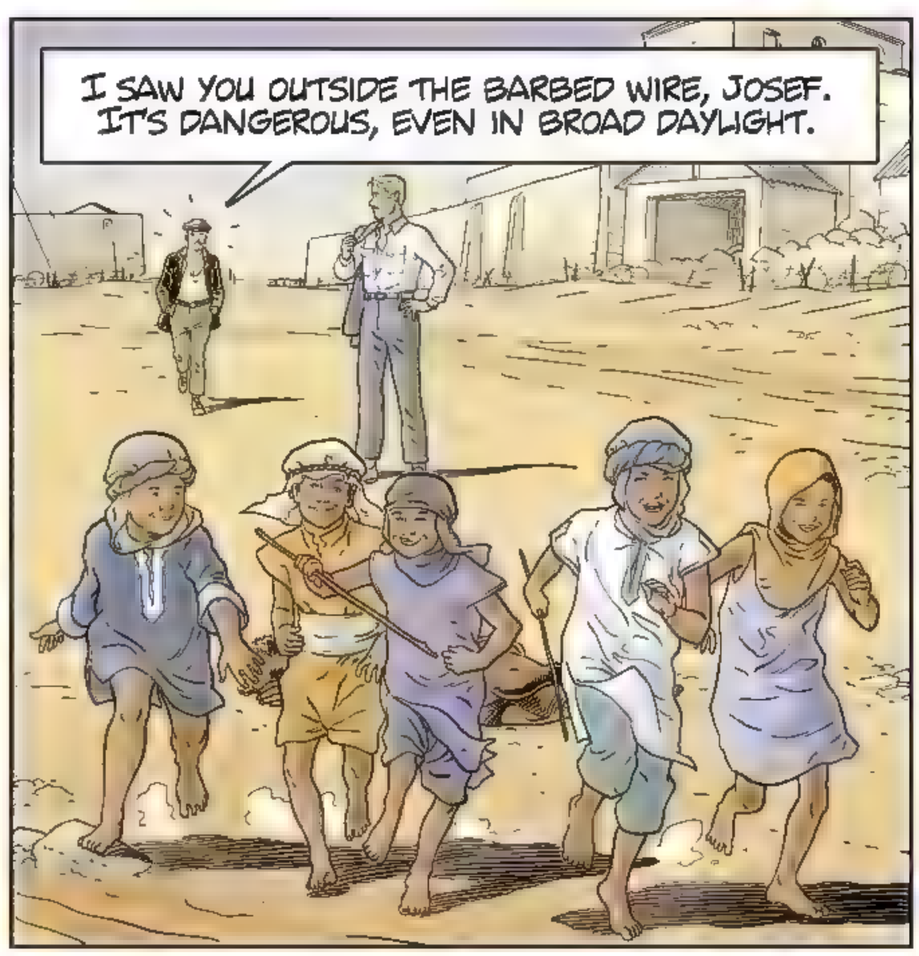


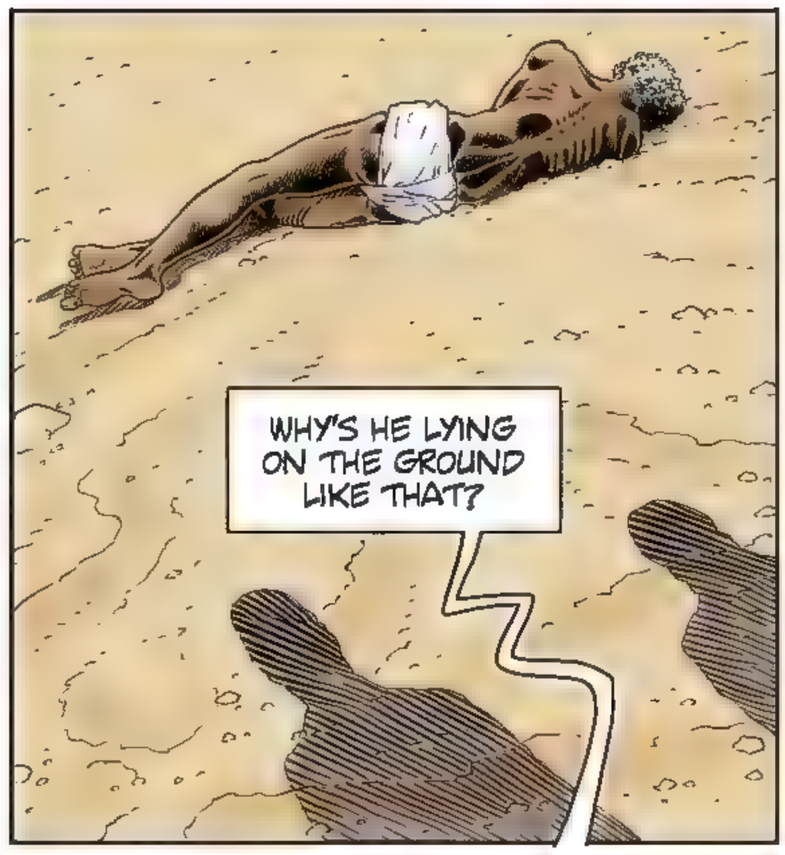


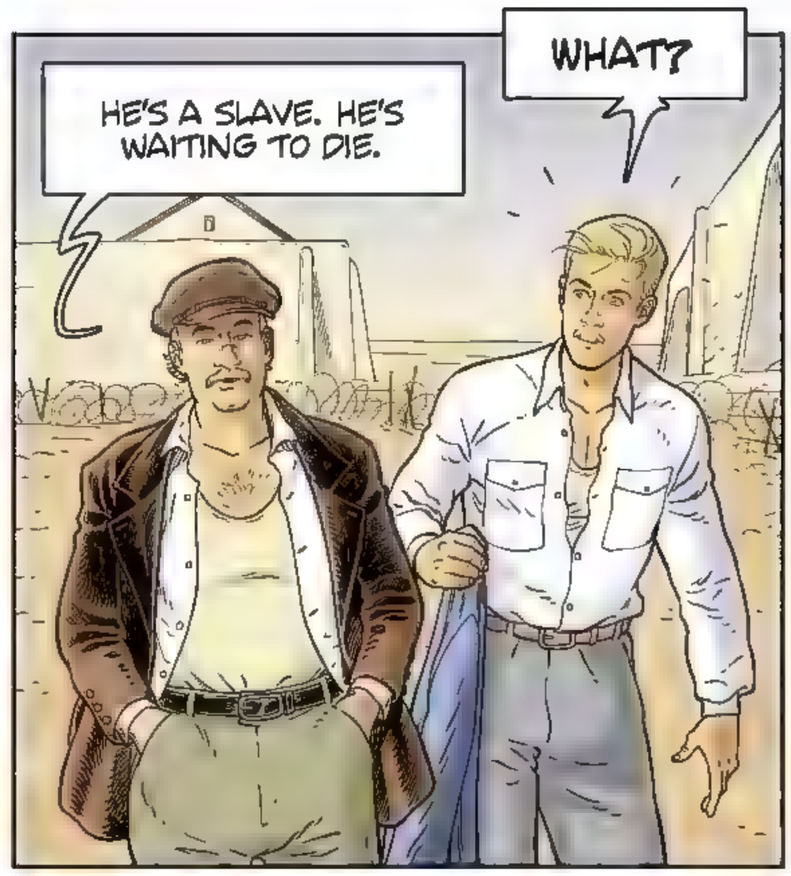
UNLIKE CASABLANCA, WHERE THERE WAS PLENTY TO DO, CAPE JUBY WAS THE EPITOME OF BOREDOM. WORSE, IT WAS LIKE A HUGE, SUFFOCATING VACUUM. EXCEPT FOR THE LAPPING OF THE WAVES, YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT GOD HAD ABANDONED THE PLACE.

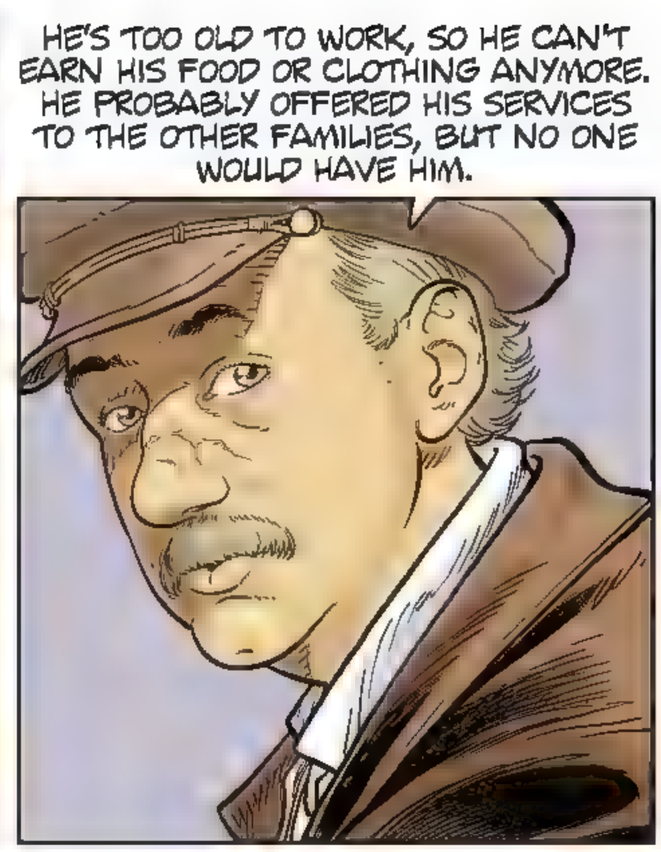


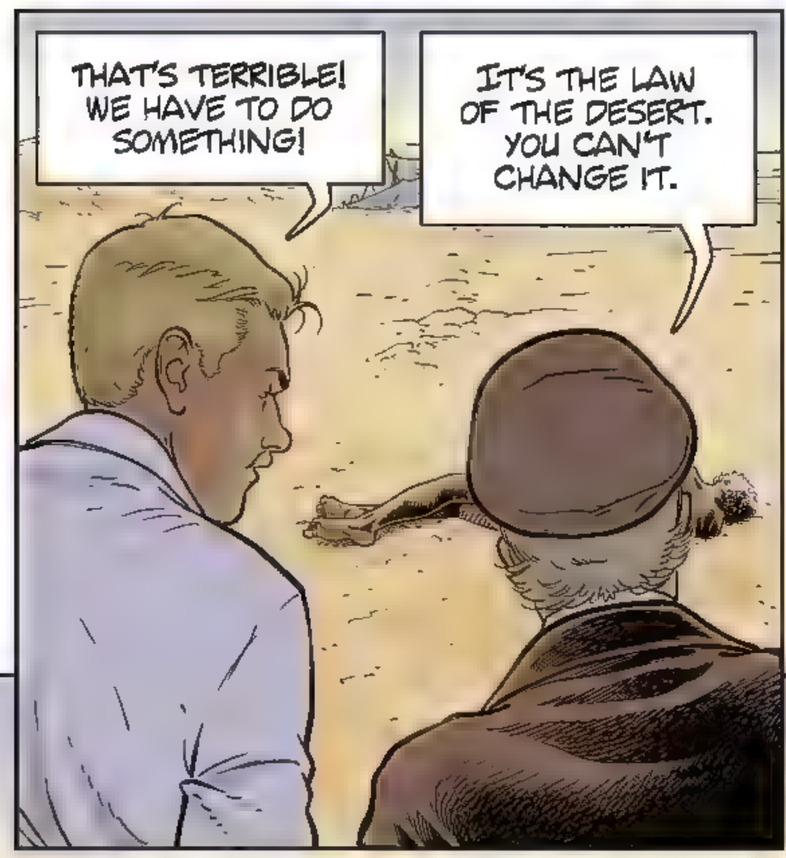


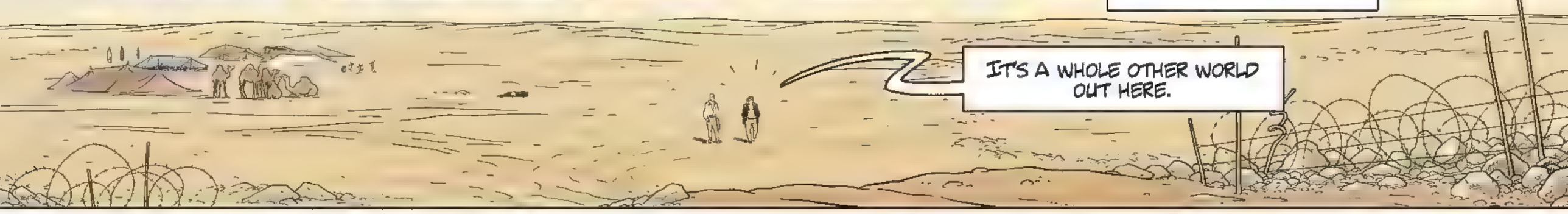




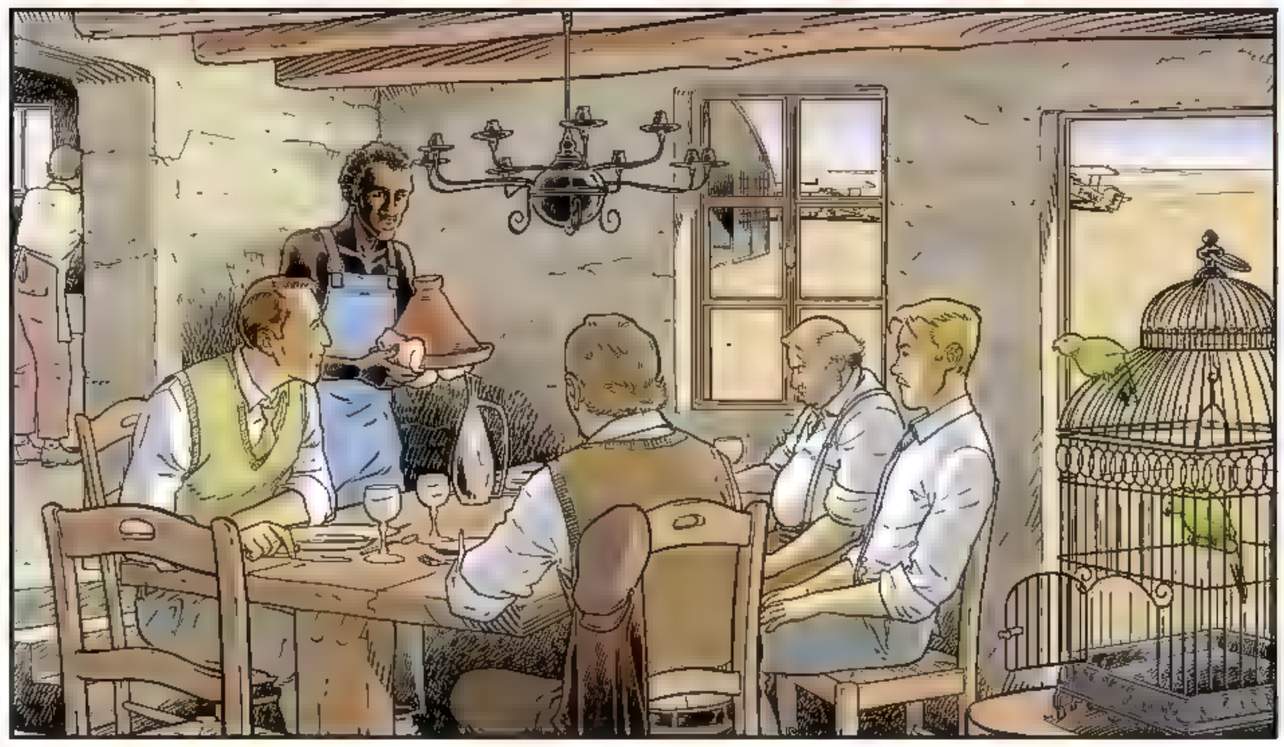








THE THREE PERMANENT MEMBERS OF STAFF--THE MANAGER, VIDAL, AND THE MECHANICS--AND THE PILOTS FLYING IN AND OUT LIVED IN A BUILDING OUTSIDE THE FORT, WHICH WAS AS COMFORTABLE AS IT COULD BE.



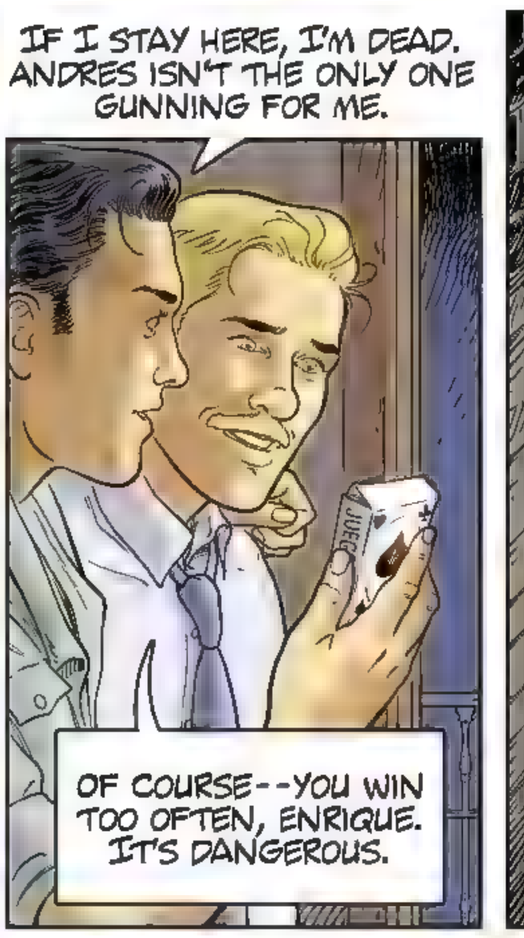
SO AS NOT TO DESECRATE THEIR LITTLE HAVEN OF NORMALITY, AS SOON AS I'D FINISHED EATING, I WENT TO THE SPANIARDS' CANTEEN INSTEAD...
...AND JOINED IN THEIR GAMES OF DICE, CARDS, OR DOMINOS, WHICH WERE THE ONLY DISTRACTIONS THOSE POOR DEADBEATS HAD.
AND DRINKING AND FIGHTING, OF COURSE.
¡HIJO DE PUTA! ¡HICISTE TRAMPA!
?!
?
(MOTHERFUCKER! YOU CHEATED!)
NO SOONER WERE VOICES RAISED IN ANGER THAN OUT CAME THE KNIVES.
¡TE VOY A PINCHAR LA BARRIGA!
clic!
(I'LL GUT YOU LIKE A FISH!)
IN A FAIR FIGHT? LIKE YOU DID ROBERTO? AFTER STABBING HIM IN THE BACK IN THE LATRINES?
¡VETE A LA MIERDA!
(GO FUCK YOURSELF!)

I GOT FRIENDLY WITH ONE OF THEM, WHO DRAGGED ME INTO HIS OWN LITTLE GAME.
I THINK YOU JUST MADE ANOTHER FRIEND, ENRIQUE!

I'D SOMETIMES GIVE HIM THE KEYS TO OUR HANGAR SO THAT HE COULD SPEND THE NIGHT THERE WITH AN ARAB GIRL, WHO WASN'T ALLOWED INTO THE FORT.

A BED OF STONES OUTSIDE WAS LESS COMFORTABLE AND MUCH LESS SAFE--THE TRIBESMEN WOULDN'T HAVE APPROVED.
JOSEF, I CAN TRUST YOU... AND I NEED YOUR HELP.
??

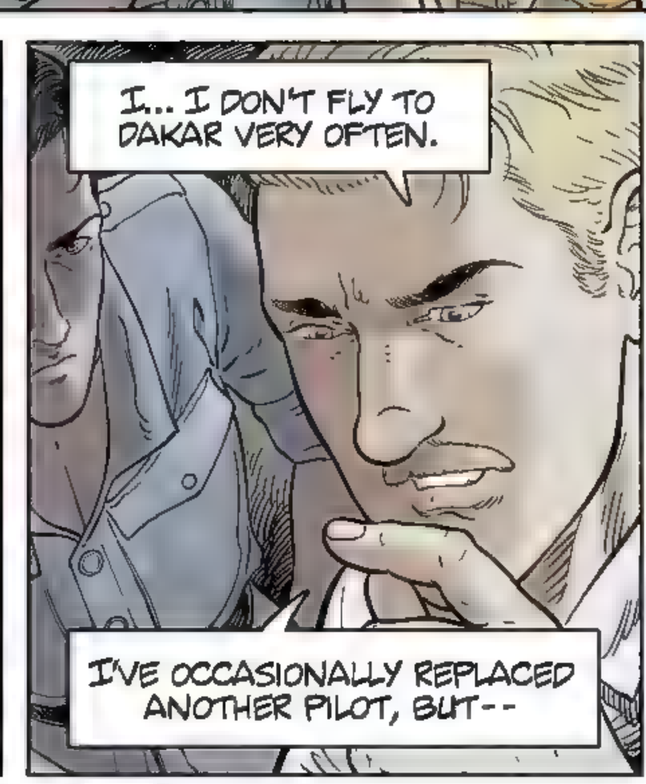
TO GET INTO THE HANGAR?
SÍ, PERO...
...FOR SOME-THING ELSE.

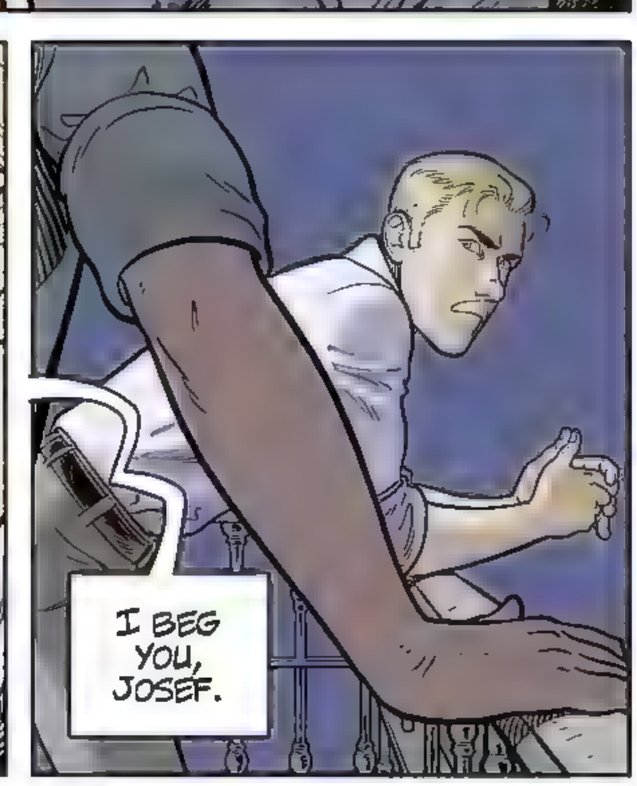

IF I STAY HERE, I'M DEAD. ANDRES ISN'T THE ONLY ONE GUNNING FOR ME.
OF COURSE--YOU WIN TOO OFTEN, ENRIQUE. IT'S DANGEROUS.

I DO IT TO BUY MY FREEDOM, JOSEF. I HAVE ENOUGH STASHED AWAY NOW.
?
TAKE ME TO DAKAR IN YOUR PLANE! I'LL PAY YOU.

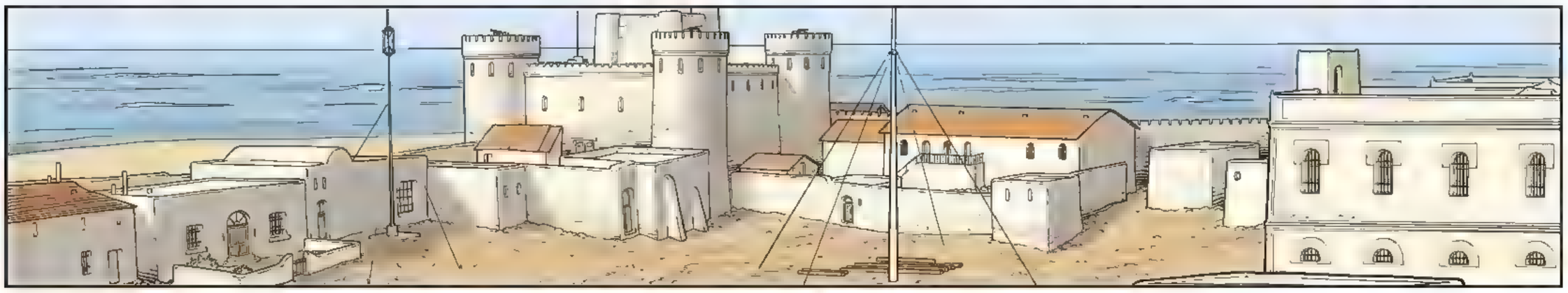
YOU WANT TO DESERT?
SHHHHH
NOT MANY OF THEM UNDERSTAND YOU, BUT PLEASE BE CAREFUL.

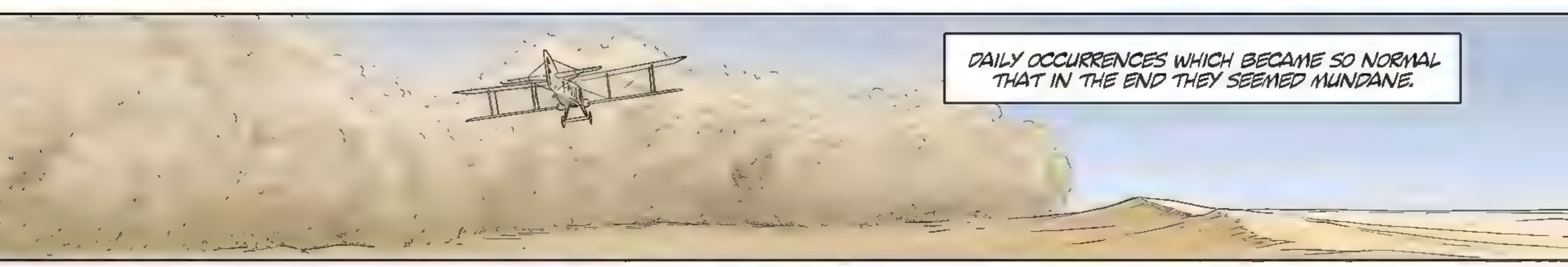
I HAVE THREE MORE YEARS TO SERVE, AND I REFUSE TO DIE IN THIS SHITHOLE.
YOU'RE ASKING A LOT, ENRIQUE.
I COULD LOSE MY JOB.
I'LL PAY YOU WELL... VERY WELL, IF NECESSARY.


I... I DON'T FLY TO DAKAR VERY OFTEN.
I'VE OCCASIONALLY REPLACED ANOTHER PILOT, BUT--

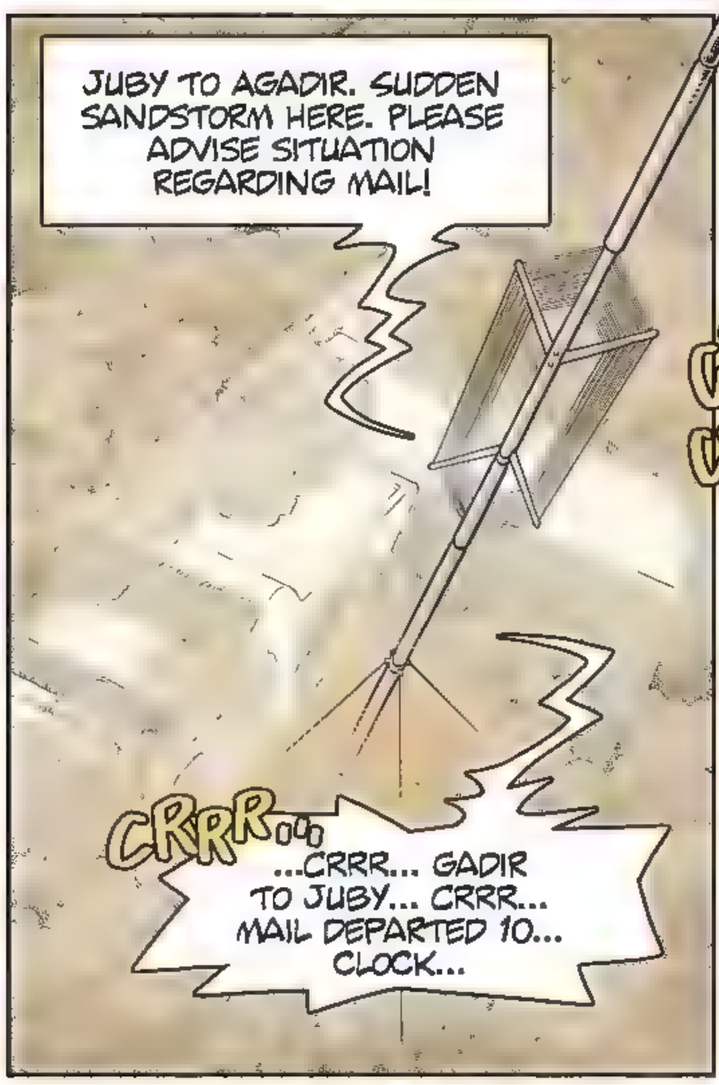

I BEG YOU, JOSEF.

SEVERAL WEEKS WENT BY, PUNCTUATED BY ALL THE VICISSITUDES OF A LIFE DEDICATED TO THE DELIVERY OF AIRMAIL. ENGINE FAILURES, PILOTS LOST AND FOUND... OR CAPTURED BY THE BEDOUIN AND FREED IN EXCHANGE FOR A RANSOM PAYMENT--SOMETIMES.

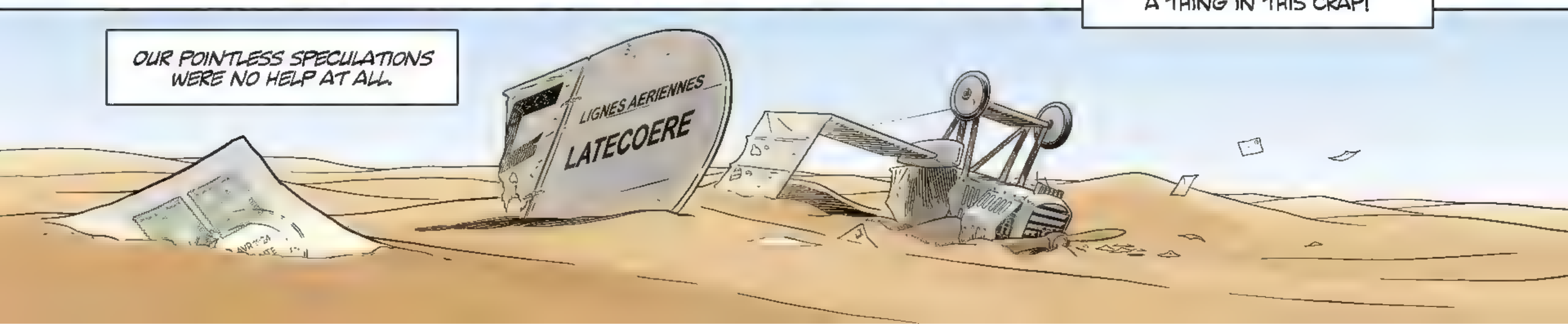




BUT WHEN THE ELEMENTS CONSPIRED AGAINST US TO GROUND OUR PLANES, ALL WE COULD DO WAS DANCE AROUND THE WIRELESS LIKE SAVAGES APPEALING TO THEIR GODS FOR A FAVORABLE PROPHECY.



BUT THERE WAS NO ANSWER FROM VILLA CISNEROS. THEY WEREN'T ON DUTY YET.



TAKE POOR BARK BACK HOME, BOSS! PLEASE! YOU FLY LIKE BIRD IN SKY!

??

TAKE YOU BACK? WHERE'S HOME, BARK?

SAINT-LOUIS...

THAT'S IN SENEGAL!

DON'T YOU LIKE IT HERE? DON'T YOU WANT TO WORK FOR US ANYMORE?

WORK, YES, BUT NOT FOR MY MASTER. HE BAD. HE BEAT ME ALL TIME.

HE BEATS YOU? WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT?

TAKE HIM BACK HOME?

NO WAY, JOSEF!

HE'S A SLAVE WHO BELONGS TO ZIN OULD RHATTARI, THE CHIEF OF THE TRIBE THAT'S CAMPED HERE. WE PAY BARK'S WAGES TO HIM.

BUT... BUT THAT'S--

TERRIBLE! I KNOW, JOSEF. BUT I'M AFRAID IT'S--

THE LAW OF THE DESERT! YEAH, YOU SAID...

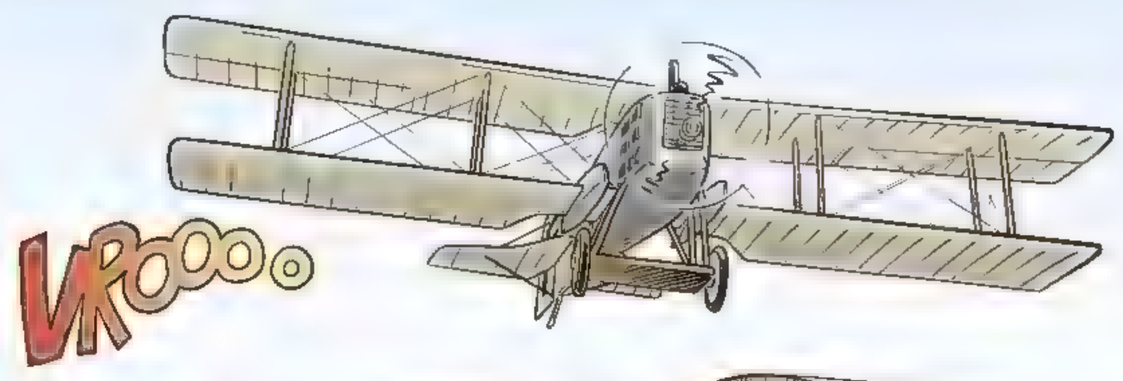
...EXCEPT THAT INSIDE THE BARBED WIRE COUNTS AS FRANCE!

IT'S ACTUALLY SPANISH, AND DE LA PEÑA DOESN'T WANT TROUBLE WITH THE NATIVES.

IF YOU WANT TO FREE BARK, THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY, JOE...

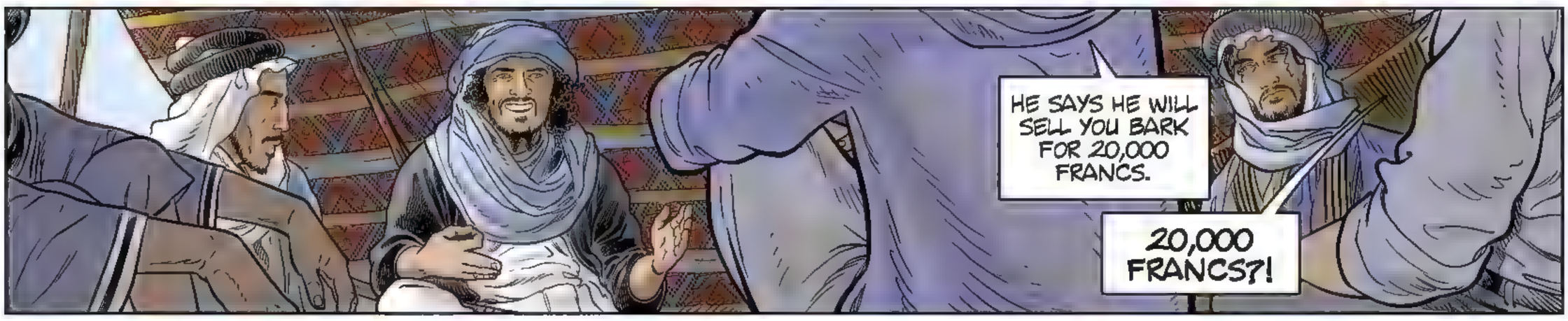
BUY HIM FROM THE CHIEF!

OTHERWISE, THE BEDOUIN WILL FEEL CHEATED, AND THEIR DESERT BRETHREN ARE LIKELY TO TAKE BLOODY REVENGE ON THE FIRST PILOT THEY LAY THEIR HANDS ON.

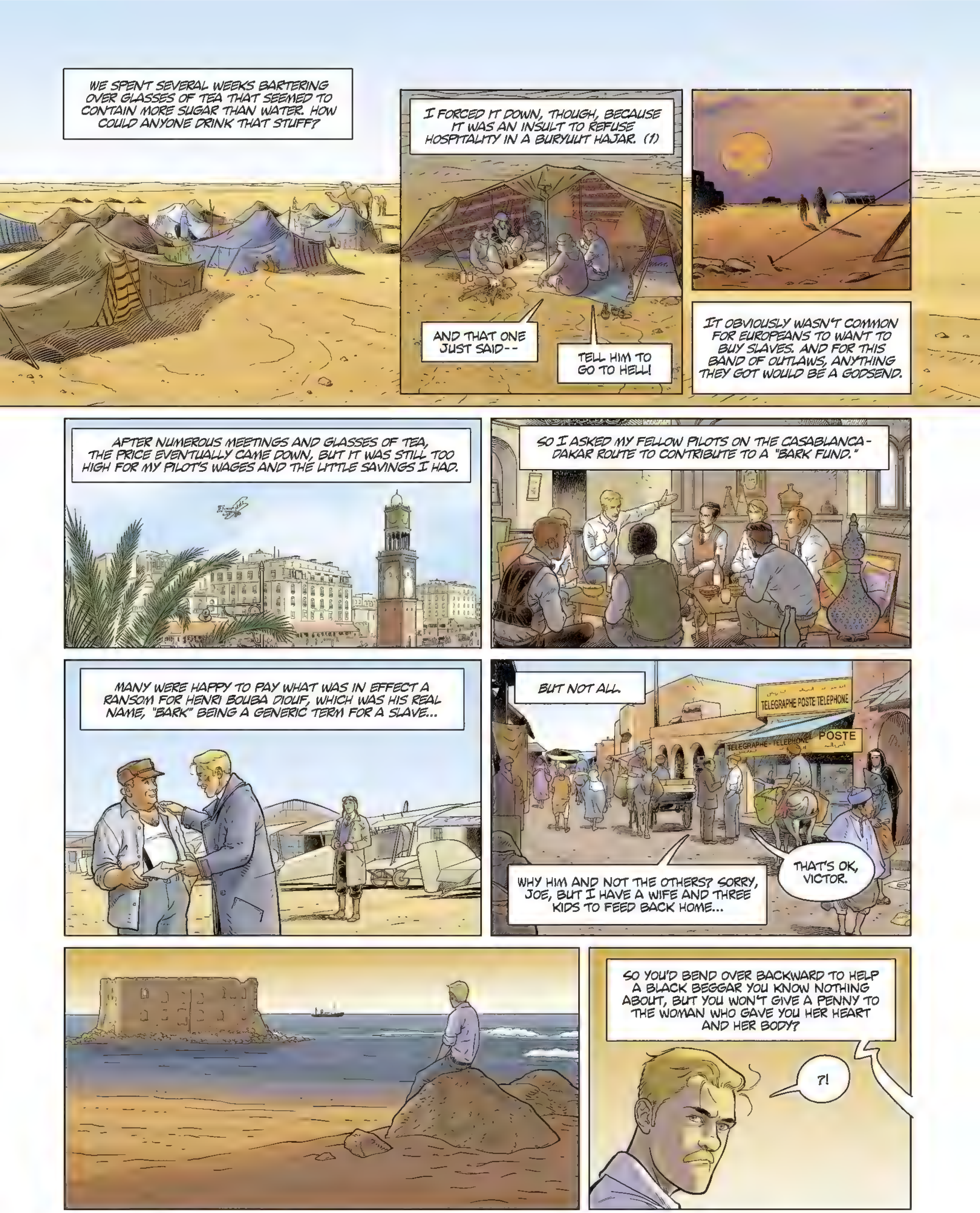


"RETTEN WAS ZU RETTEN IST," (1) AS THE GERMANS SAY. SO I SPENT MY DAYS AT CAPE JUBY TRYING TO BUY BARK FROM THE TRIBE.

WITH MOUYANE'S HELP, I ENTERED INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE WILY ZIN OULD RHATTARI.



(1) "SAVE WHAT CAN BE SAVED."



(1) A BEDOUIN TENT (LITERALLY "HOUSE OF HAIR").

ADÈLE?

WHY SHOULD I HELP HER? SHE BETRAYED ME!

TO DO YOUR DUTY AS A FATHER AND GIVE YOUR SON A DECENT UPBRINGING, PERHAPS!

?!

YOU DIDN'T KNOW?

OBVIOUSLY NOT, SINCE YOU SENT BACK ALL HER LETTERS.

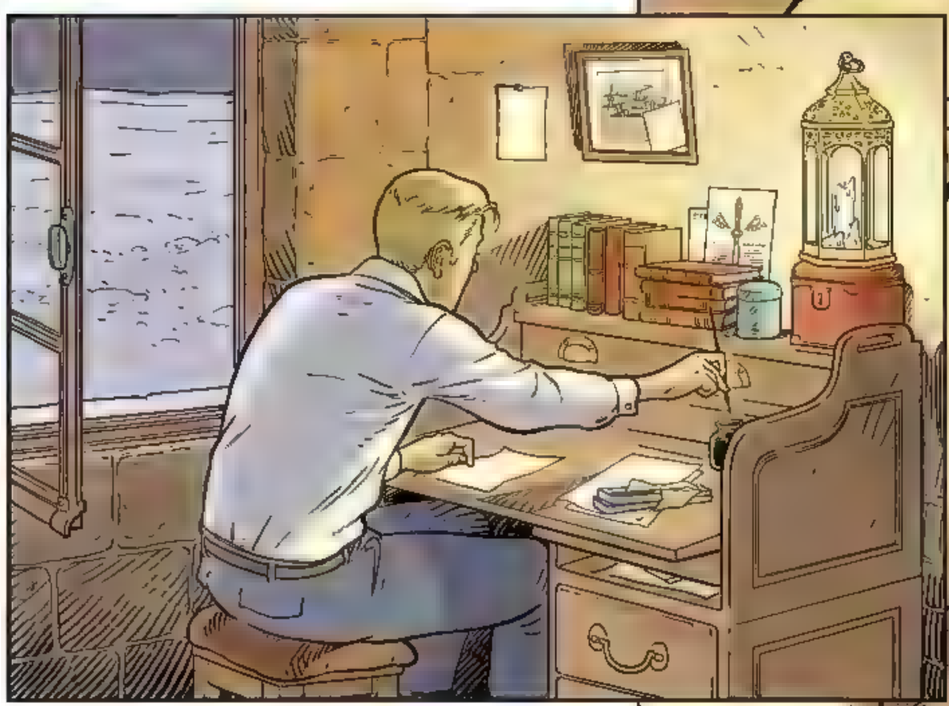
SHE DIDN'T WANT ME TO TELL YOU. SHE'S PROUD AND STUBBORN.

SO WHY DID YOU?

BECAUSE SHE'S BROKENHEARTED, AND IT RUBS ME RAW TO SEE YOU NOT GIVING A DAMN WHAT HAPPENS TO HER.

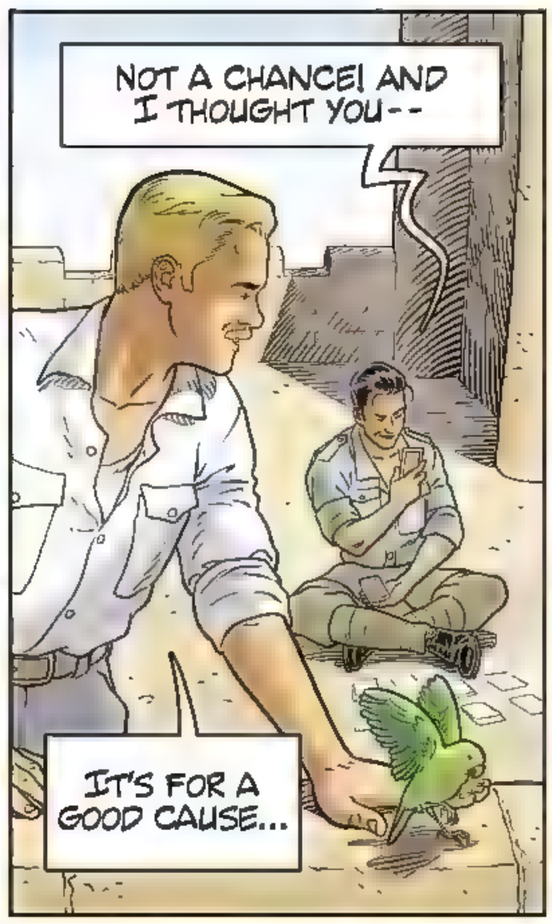
AFTER YOU KNOCKED HER UP AND ABANDONED HER, THE VILLAGE FOLK STARTED CALLING HER A HARLOT... IT GOT SO BAD THAT SHE HAD TO SELL UP FOR NEXT TO NOTHING AND LEAVE.

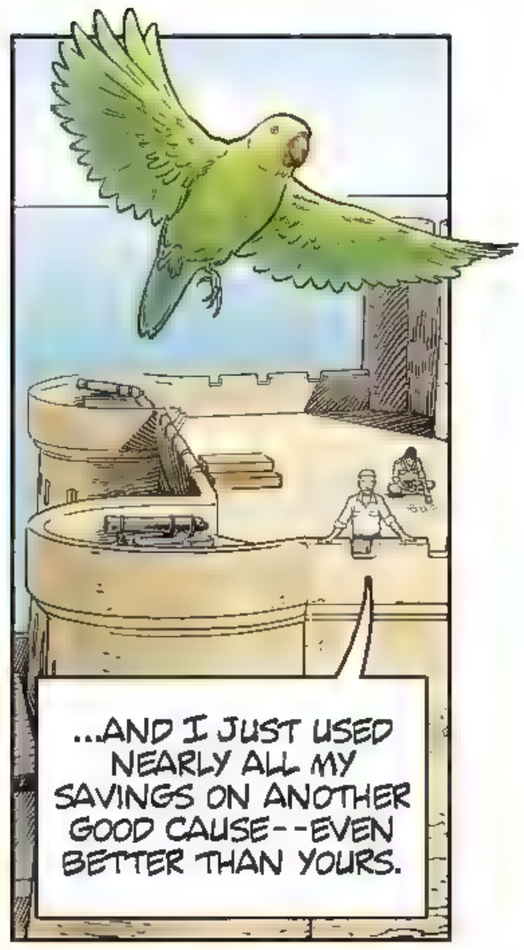
HER AUNT AND UNCLE TOOK HER IN, RELUCTANTLY. THEY AREN'T BAD PEOPLE, BUT HER UNCLE WON'T EVEN SPEAK TO HER. HE SAYS SHE'S BROUGHT SHAME ON THE FAMILY...



life here isn't easy, but I'm doing what
was destined to do.
fly!
I always told you it was what I wanted
I don't know if I'm still in love with you, Adèle, but my sense of duty
obliges me to ask you to marry me... if that's what you want, of course.
It would be wrong for our son to grow up without a father.
Since I'm earning a decent salary now (even though other airlines
pay their pilots better), I'll start sending you money to pa
for the things you need.

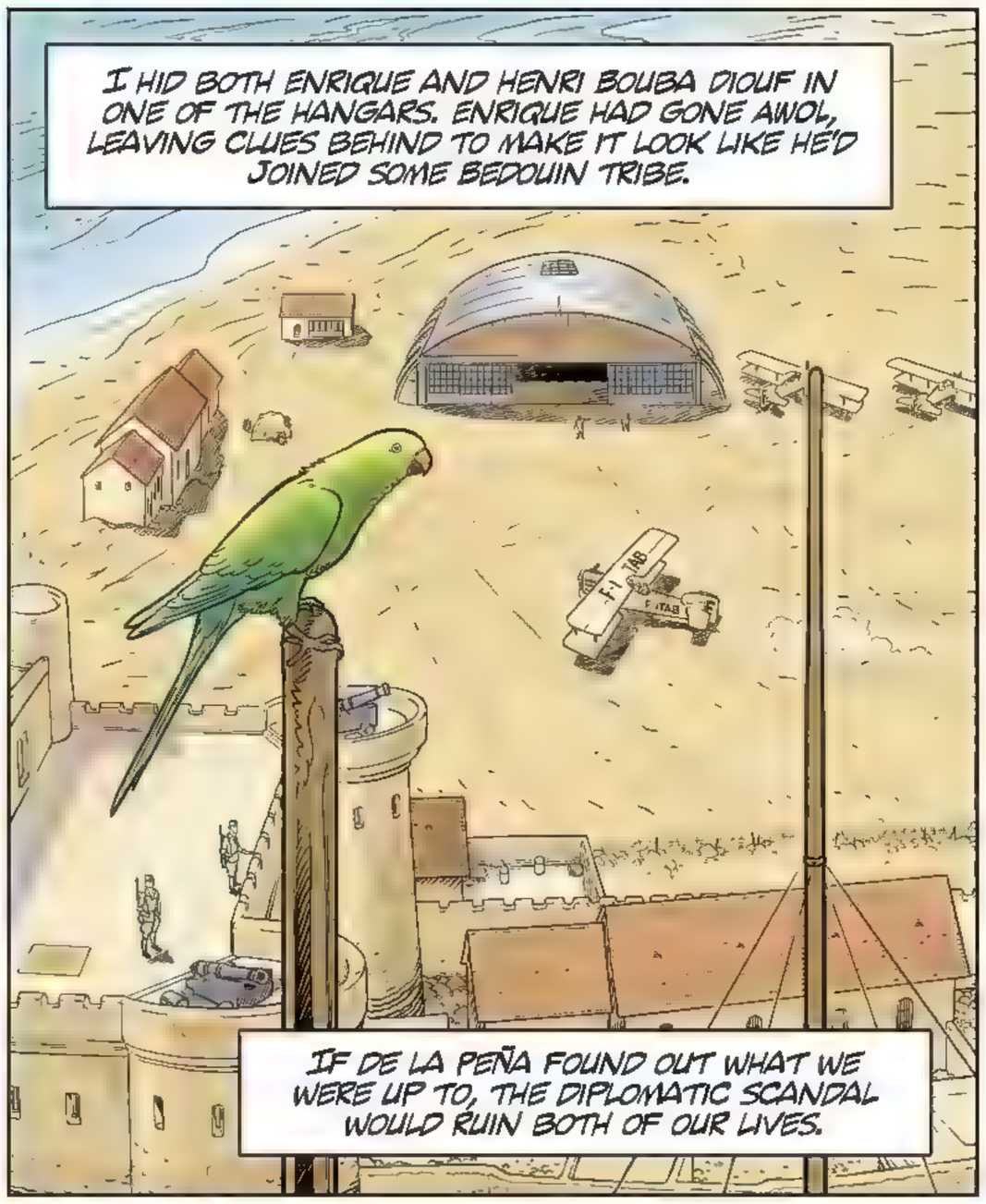
I forgot to ask: what did you call our son? Pl
write to me at the address below

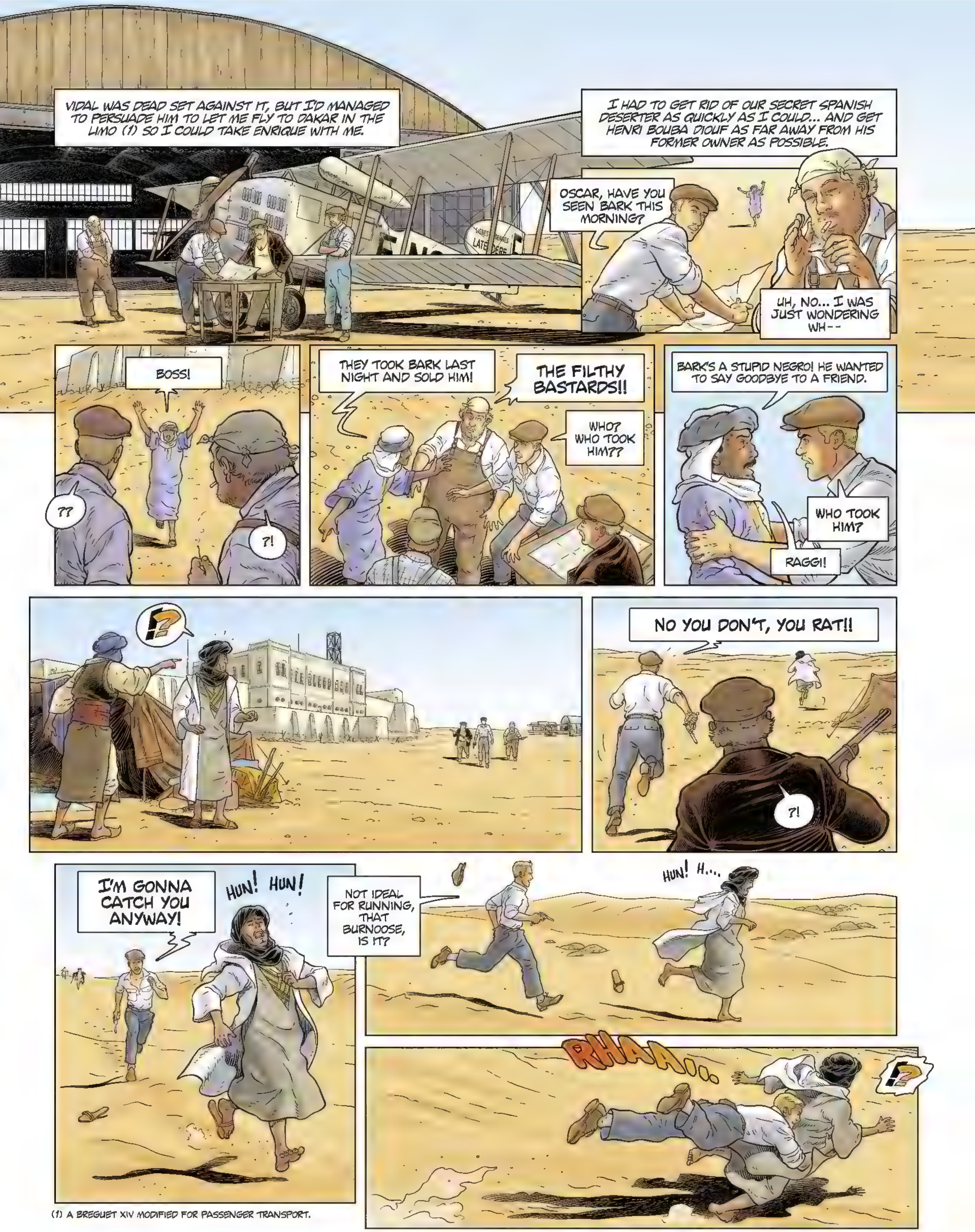




ENRIQUE PAID UP, AND I FINALLY AGREED ON A PRICE FOR BARK. HE WAS HANDED OVER TO ME, AND I IMMEDIATELY SIGNED AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT GIVING HIM HIS FREEDOM. THERE WAS A BIG CEREMONY WITH THAT CROOK ZIN OULD RHATTARI.

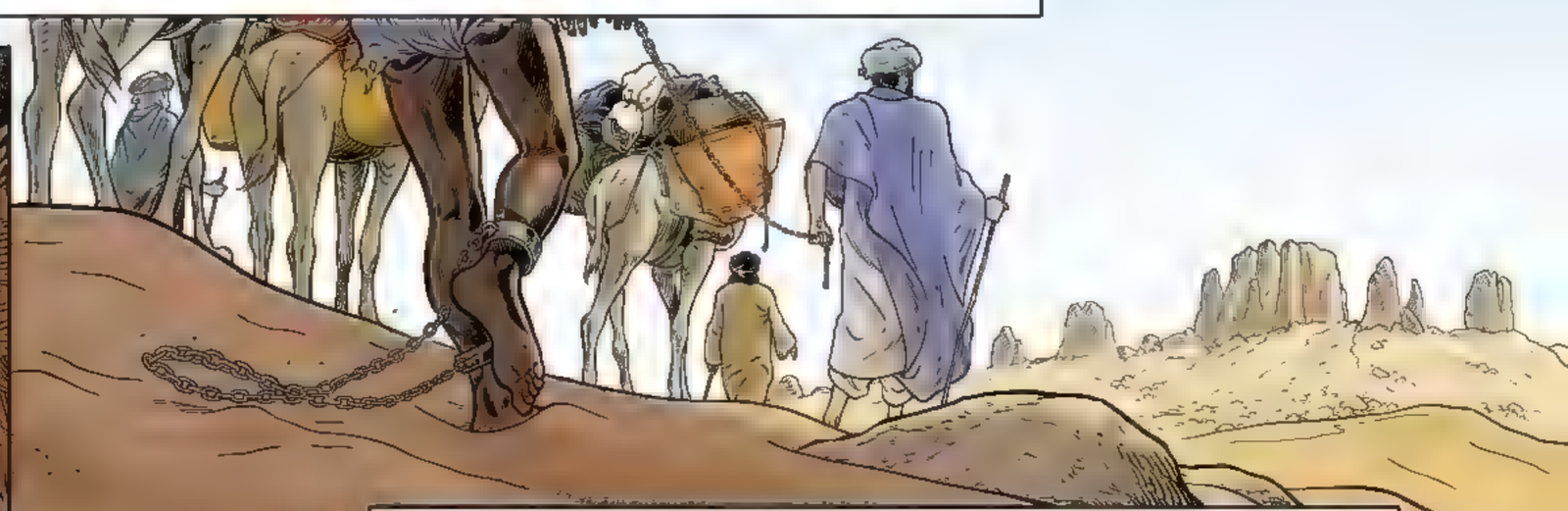
LEGALLY, HE WAS ALSO MY SON. AND THAT WAS HOW I SUDDENLY FOUND MYSELF WITH TWO KIDS!



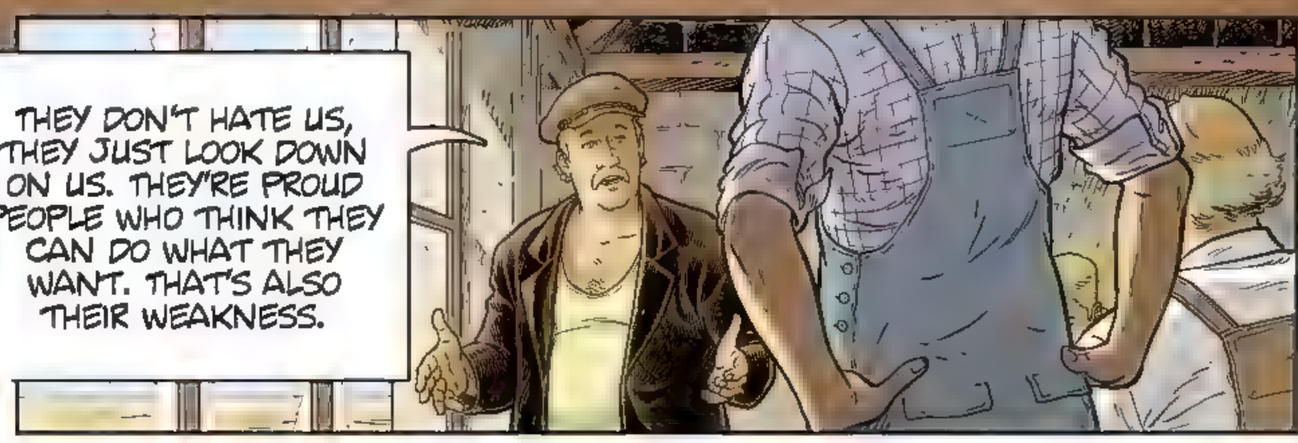


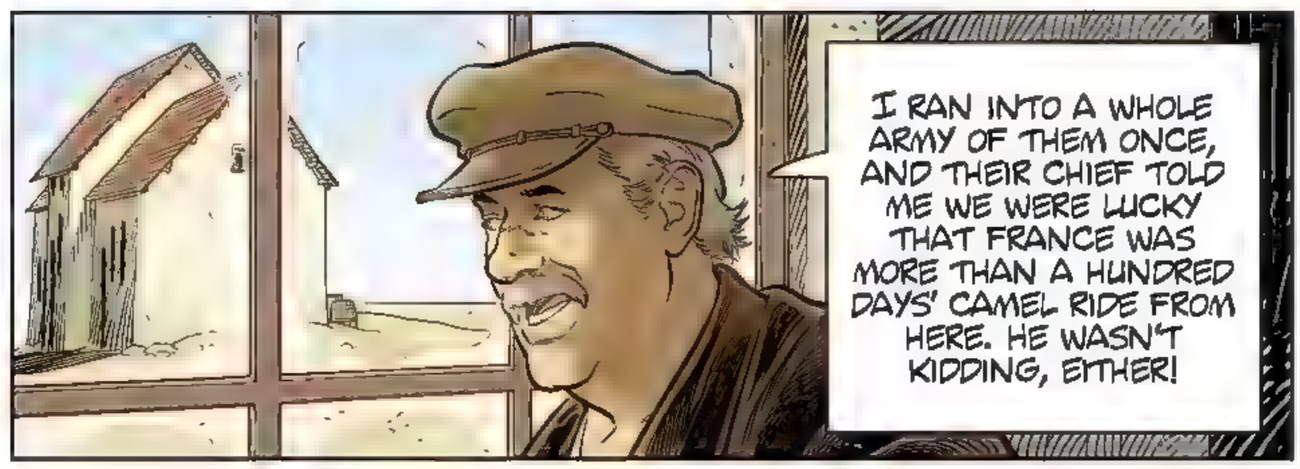
(1) A BREGUET XIV MODIFIED FOR PASSENGER TRANSPORT.

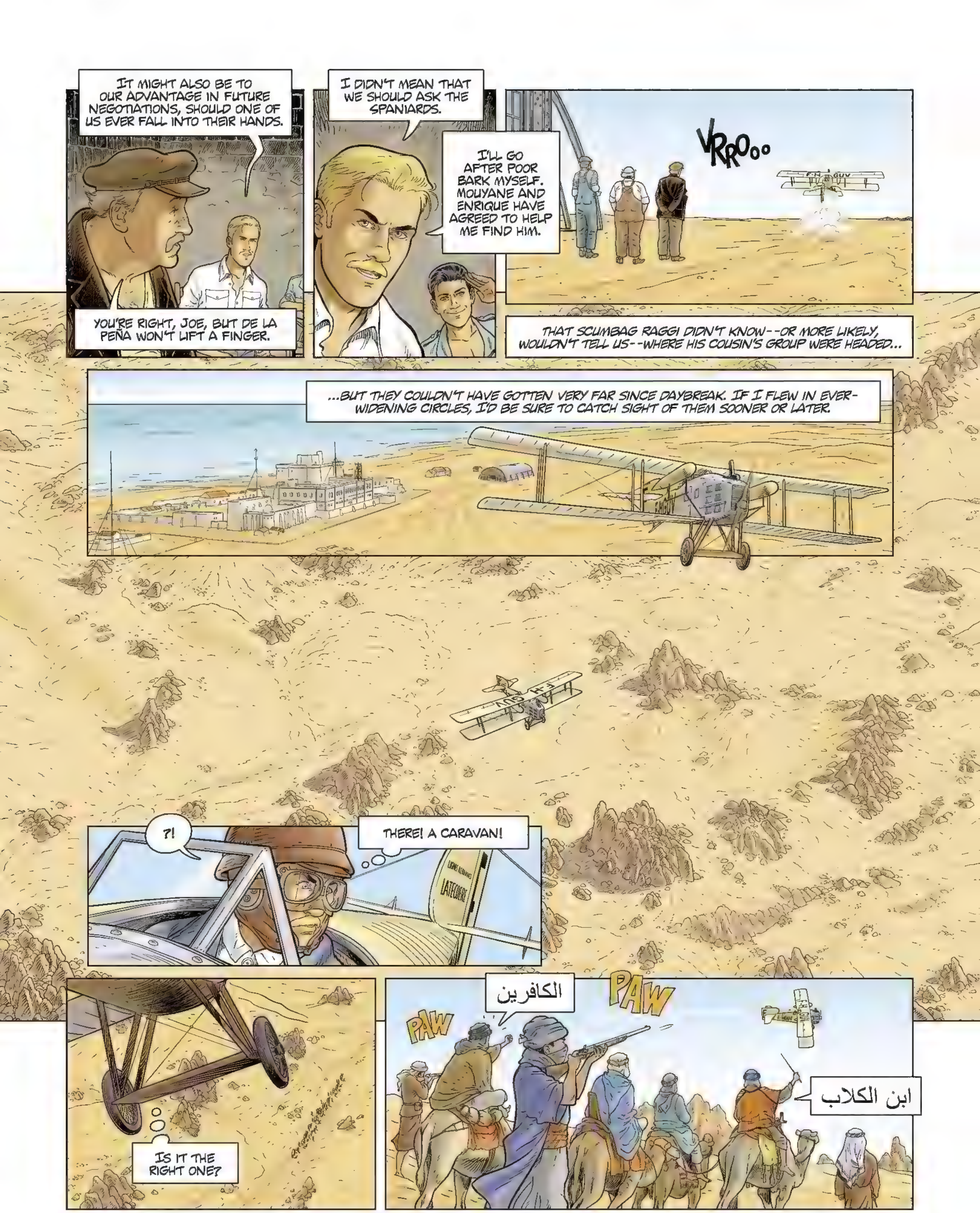
WITH MOUYANE'S HELP, WE DISCOVERED THAT RAGGI OWED MONEY TO A NOMAD COUSIN WHO'D RECENTLY TURNED UP AT CAPE JUBY. NOT HAVING ENOUGH TO REPAY HIM, RAGGI HAD SPOTTED HENRI RISKING A RETURN TO THE CAMP TO SAY GOODBYE TO HIS FRIEND BOUBACAR, AND SEIZED HIS CHANCE.

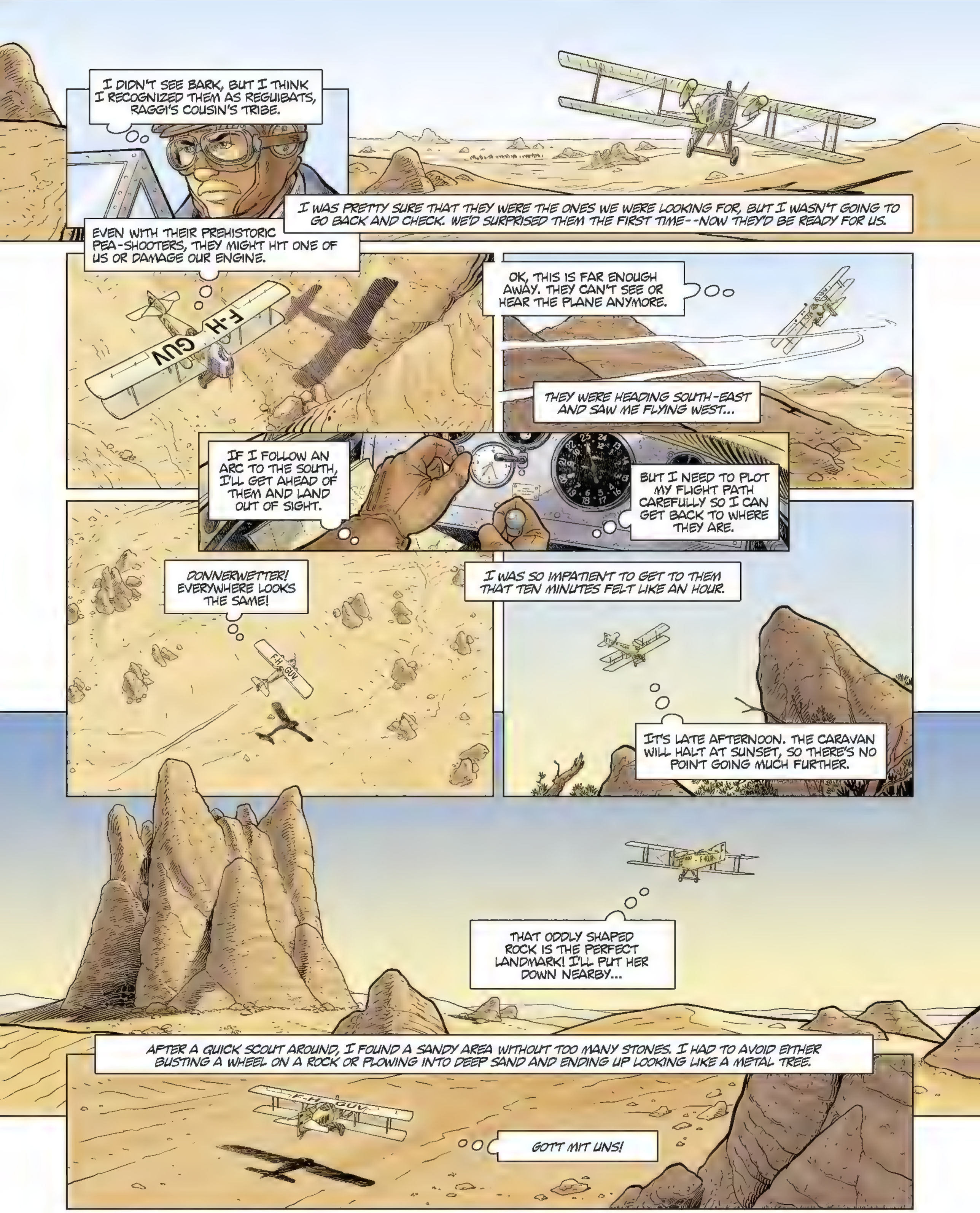


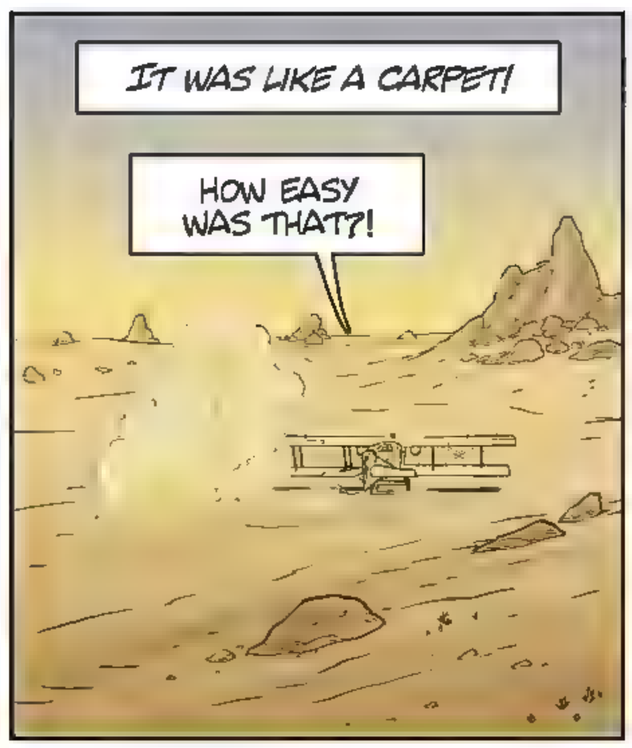
SO HENRI BOUBA DIOUF HAD BECOME BARK AGAIN, AND WAS SOMEWHERE OUT IN THE RÍO DE ORO WITH A TRIBE OF NOMADS, THE COUSIN HAVING TAKEN HIM IN LIEU OF PAYMENT.

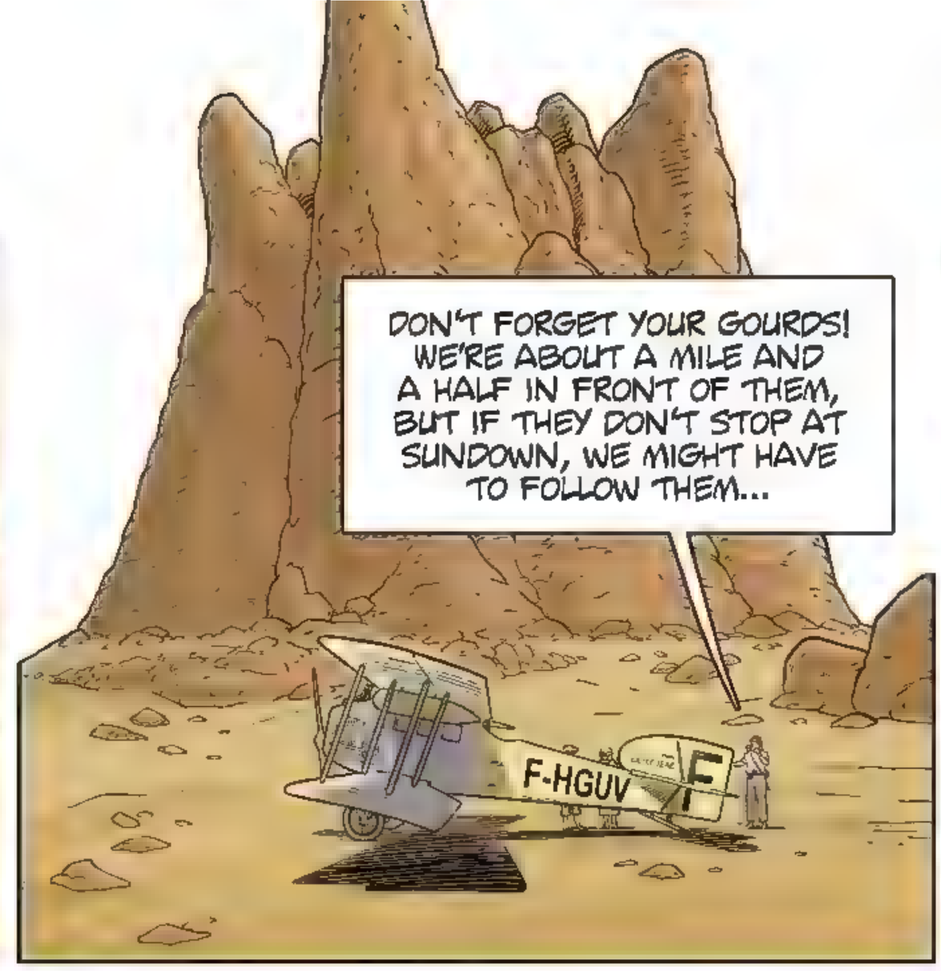


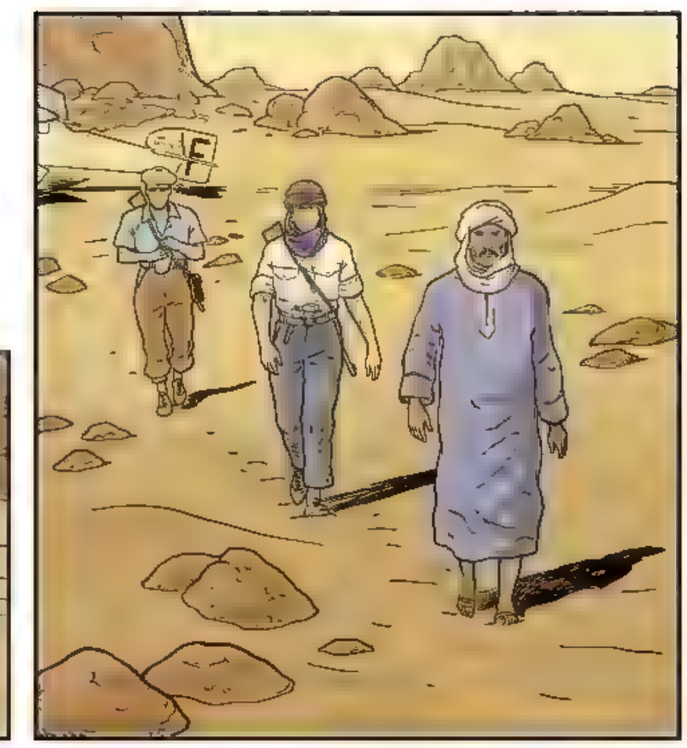


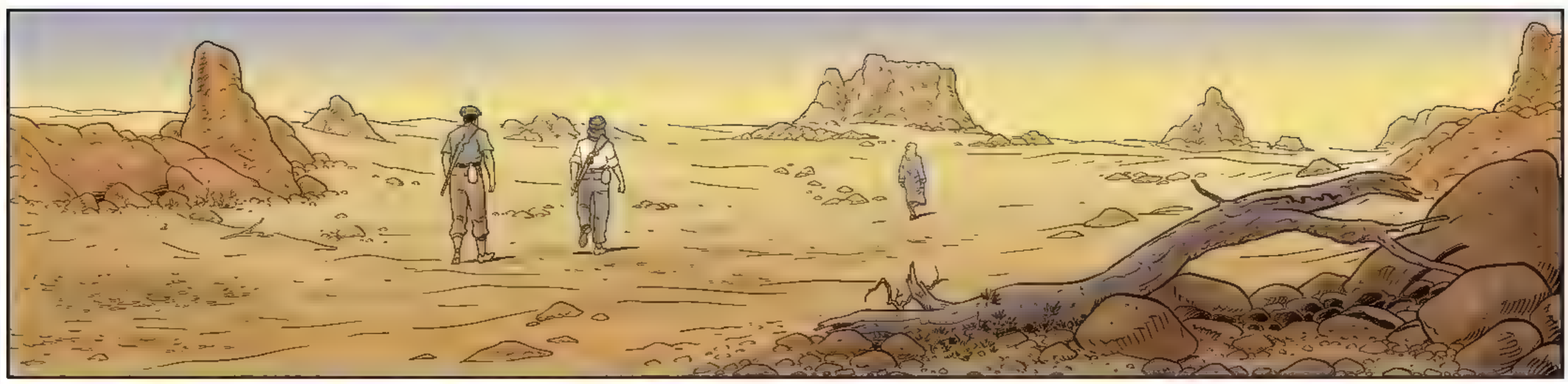

IT MIGHT ALSO BE TO OUR ADVANTAGE IN FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS, SHOULD ONE OF US EVER FALL INTO THEIR HANDS.
YOU'RE RIGHT, JOE, BUT DE LA PEÑA WON'T LIFT A FINGER.
I DIDN'T MEAN THAT WE SHOULD ASK THE SPANIARDS.
I'LL GO AFTER POOR BARK MYSELF. MOUYANE AND ENRIQUE HAVE AGREED TO HELP ME FIND HIM.
VRROOO
THAT SCUMBAG RAGGI DIDN'T KNOW--OR MORE LIKELY, WOULDN'T TELL US--WHERE HIS COUSIN'S GROUP WERE HEADED...
...BUT THEY COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN VERY FAR SINCE DAYBREAK. IF I FLEW IN EVER-WIDENING CIRCLES, I'D BE SURE TO CATCH SIGHT OF THEM SOONER OR LATER.
?!
THERE! A CARAVAN!
LATECOERE
IS IT THE RIGHT ONE?
PAW
PAW
الكافرين
ابن الكلاب


I DIDN'T SEE BARK, BUT I THINK I RECOGNIZED THEM AS REGUIBATS, RAGGI'S COUSIN'S TRIBE.
I WAS PRETTY SURE THAT THEY WERE THE ONES WE WERE LOOKING FOR, BUT I WASN'T GOING TO GO BACK AND CHECK. WE'D SURPRISED THEM THE FIRST TIME--NOW THEY'D BE READY FOR US.
EVEN WITH THEIR PREHISTORIC PEA-SHOOTERS, THEY MIGHT HIT ONE OF US OR DAMAGE OUR ENGINE.
F-H GUV
OK, THIS IS FAR ENOUGH AWAY. THEY CAN'T SEE OR HEAR THE PLANE ANYMORE.
THEY WERE HEADING SOUTH-EAST AND SAW ME FLYING WEST...
IF I FOLLOW AN ARC TO THE SOUTH, I'LL GET AHEAD OF THEM AND LAND OUT OF SIGHT.
BUT I NEED TO PLOT MY FLIGHT PATH CAREFULLY SO I CAN GET BACK TO WHERE THEY ARE.
DONNERWETTER! EVERYWHERE LOOKS THE SAME!
I WAS SO IMPATIENT TO GET TO THEM THAT TEN MINUTES FELT LIKE AN HOUR.
IT'S LATE AFTERNOON. THE CARAVAN WILL HALT AT SUNSET, SO THERE'S NO POINT GOING MUCH FURTHER.
THAT ODDLY SHAPED ROCK IS THE PERFECT LANDMARK! I'LL PUT HER DOWN NEARBY...
AFTER A QUICK SCOUT AROUND, I FOUND A SANDY AREA WITHOUT TOO MANY STONES. I HAD TO AVOID EITHER BUSTING A WHEEL ON A ROCK OR PLOWING INTO DEEP SAND AND ENDING UP LOOKING LIKE A METAL TREE.
GOTT MIT UNS!

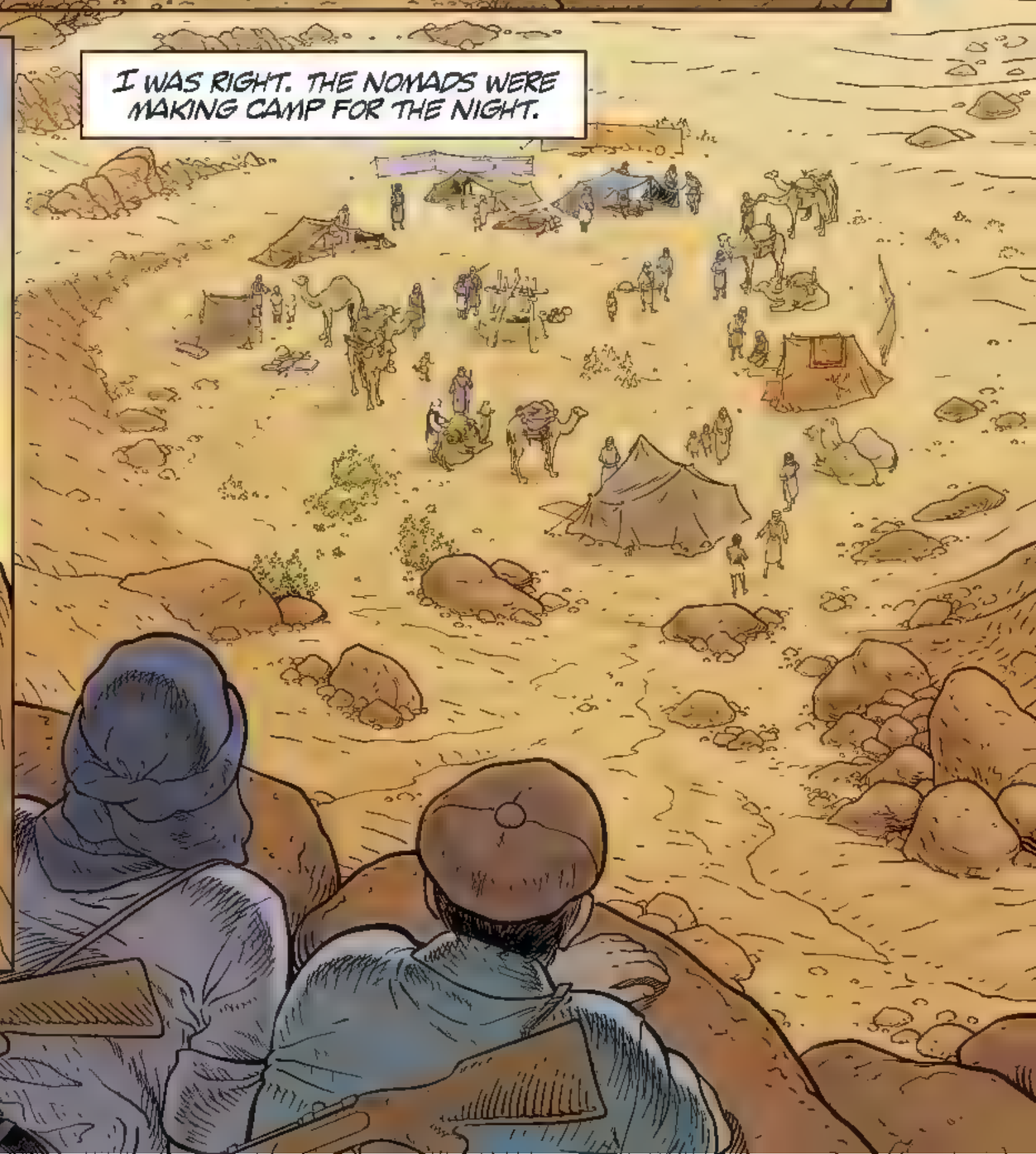

IT WAS LIKE A CARPET!
HOW EASY WAS THAT?!


DON'T FORGET YOUR GOURDS! WE'RE ABOUT A MILE AND A HALF IN FRONT OF THEM, BUT IF THEY DON'T STOP AT SUNDOWN, WE MIGHT HAVE TO FOLLOW THEM...
F-HGUV
F


F

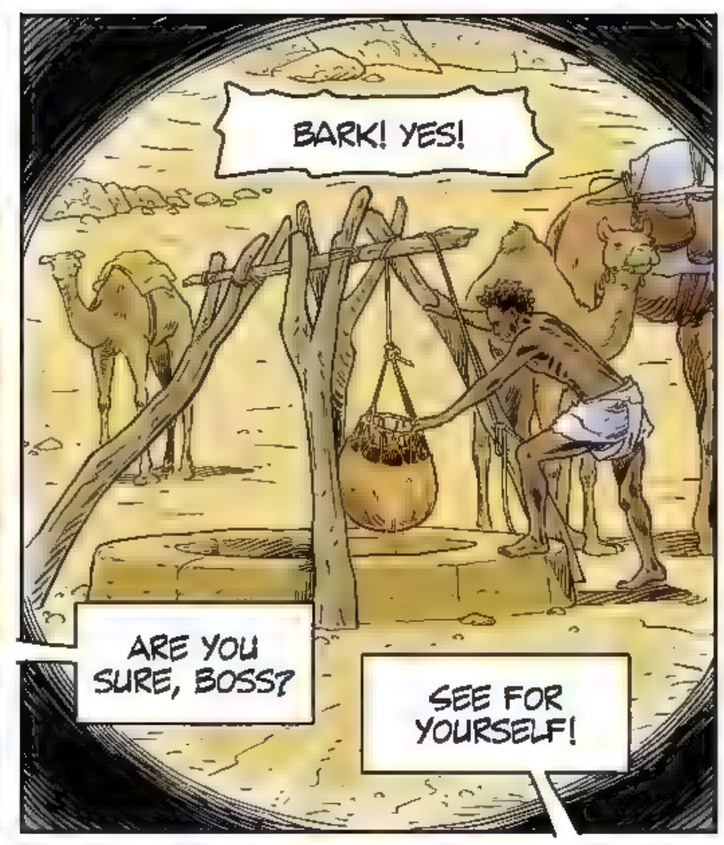


GOT 'EM!

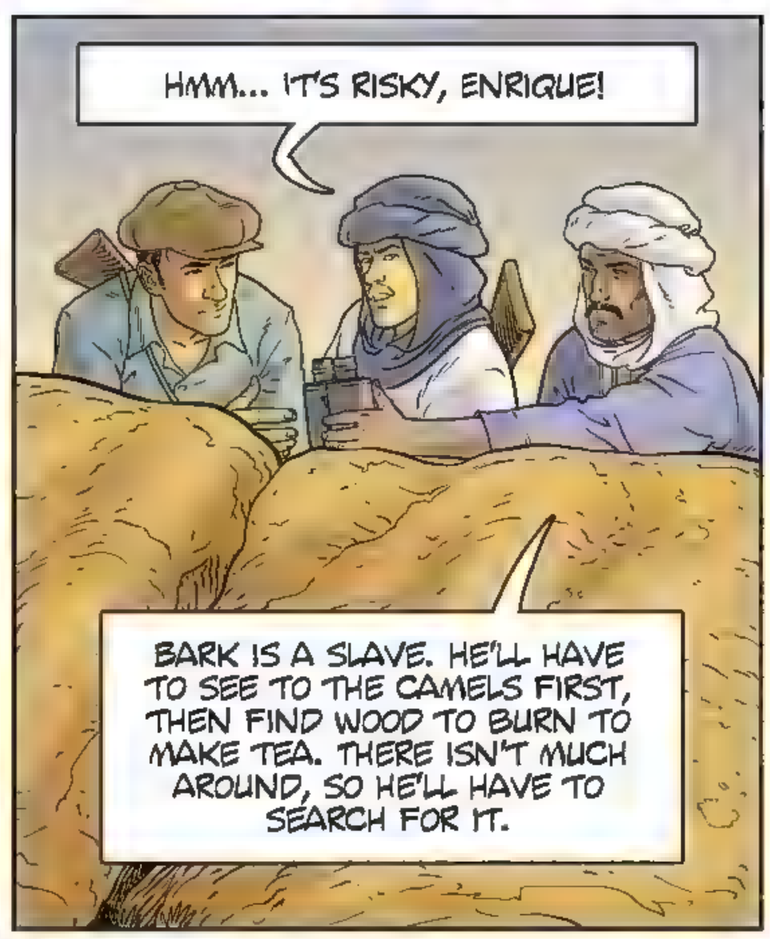

I WAS RIGHT. THE NOMADS WERE MAKING CAMP FOR THE NIGHT.

BUT WAS IT THE RIGHT TRIBE? AND WAS BARK WITH THEM?

I SCANNED THE CAMP INTENTLY. CLEARLY, THEY SUSPECTED NOTHING.


BARK! YES!
ARE YOU SURE, BOSS?
SEE FOR YOURSELF!

SO HOW ARE WE GONNA GET HIM OUT OF THERE?
WE WAIT FOR IT TO GET DARK, AND SEE WHICH TENT HE'S IN. IF THERE'S A GUARD, I'LL TAKE HIM OUT.


HMM... IT'S RISKY, ENRIQUE!
BARK IS A SLAVE. HE'LL HAVE TO SEE TO THE CAMELS FIRST, THEN FIND WOOD TO BURN TO MAKE TEA. THERE ISN'T MUCH AROUND, SO HE'LL HAVE TO SEARCH FOR IT.

WILL THEY LET A SLAVE WANDER AWAY FROM THE CAMP?
HE CAN'T ESCAPE-- THERE'S NO FOOD OR WATER...
OF COURSE. LET'S HOPE THIS SLAVE WILL DECIDE TO WANDER IN OUR DIRECTION.

UNFORTUNATELY, IT DIDN'T TURN OUT THAT WAY... HAD I NOT BEEN SO ANXIOUSLY SPYING ON THEM, I WOULD HAVE ENJOYED JUST OBSERVING THESE SIMPLE PEOPLE WHO SURVIVED ON SO LITTLE IN SUCH HARSH SURROUNDINGS.

THEIR ECONOMICAL MOVEMENTS SEEMED TO EMBODY AN ANCESTRAL WISDOM BORN OF THE RELENTLESS HEAT AND AN INEVITABLE FATALISM.
?

¡MIERDA! WE HAVE A VISITOR, MY FRIENDS, BUT NOT THE ONE WE WERE HOPING FOR.
?!

SHIT!!

¡NO! ¡NO ES POSIBLE!

من لحي النبي

اتركني !

HUM Fa...

¡CÁLLATE, CHICO!

MMUH... HUM!

WHAT NOW?

WE HOLD ON TO HIM. WE HAVE NO CHOICE.

BUT IF HE DOESN'T GO BACK, HIS FAMILY'LL COME LOOKING FOR HIM. IT'S OVER, JOE.

THEY WON'T BE WORRYING YET. LET'S JUST WAIT!

MAYBE BARK WILL COME HERE FIRST.

AND IF HE DOESN'T?

WE OFFER A SWAP...?

ONLY IF HE'S IMPORTANT--THE CHIEF'S ELDEST SON, PERHAPS. OTHERWISE...

HUH? THE CHIEF WOULD SACRIFICE SOMEONE'S KID?!

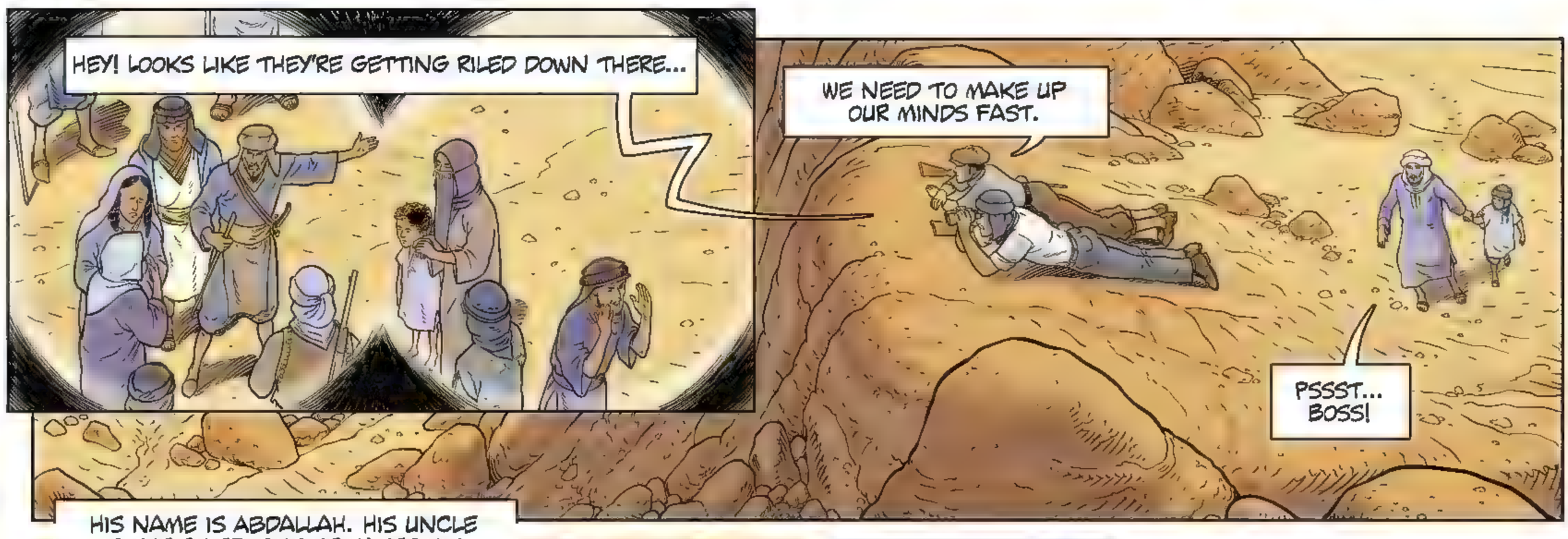
KIDS ARE EASY TO REPLACE, BUT SLAVES ARE WORTH A LOT OF MONEY!

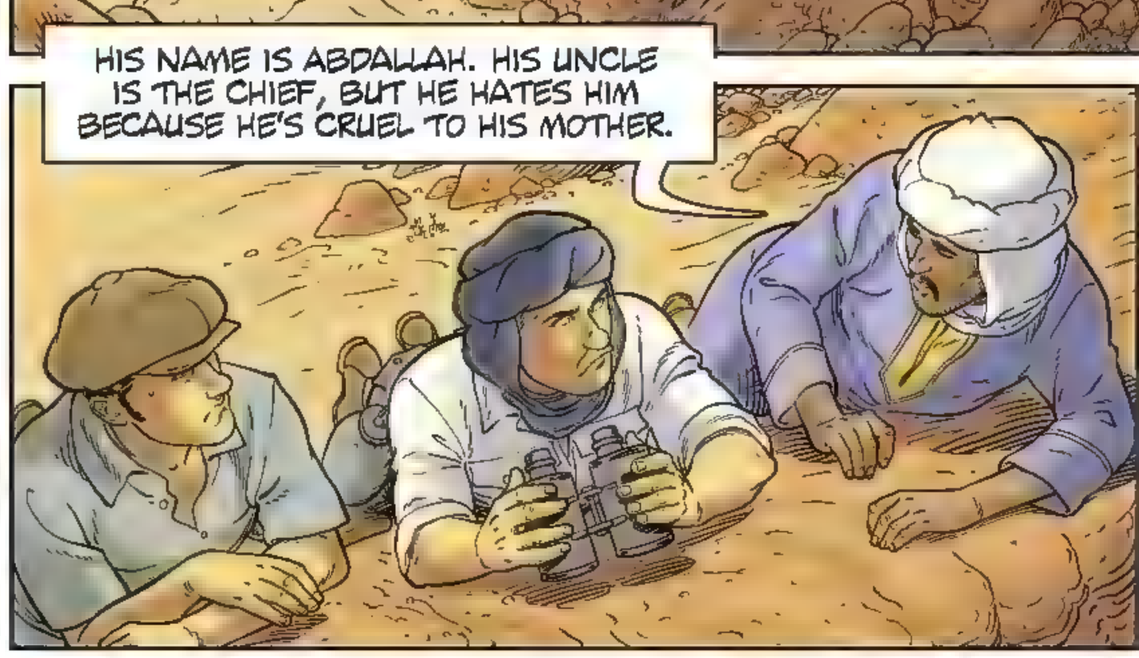
THESE BLOODY SAVAGES!

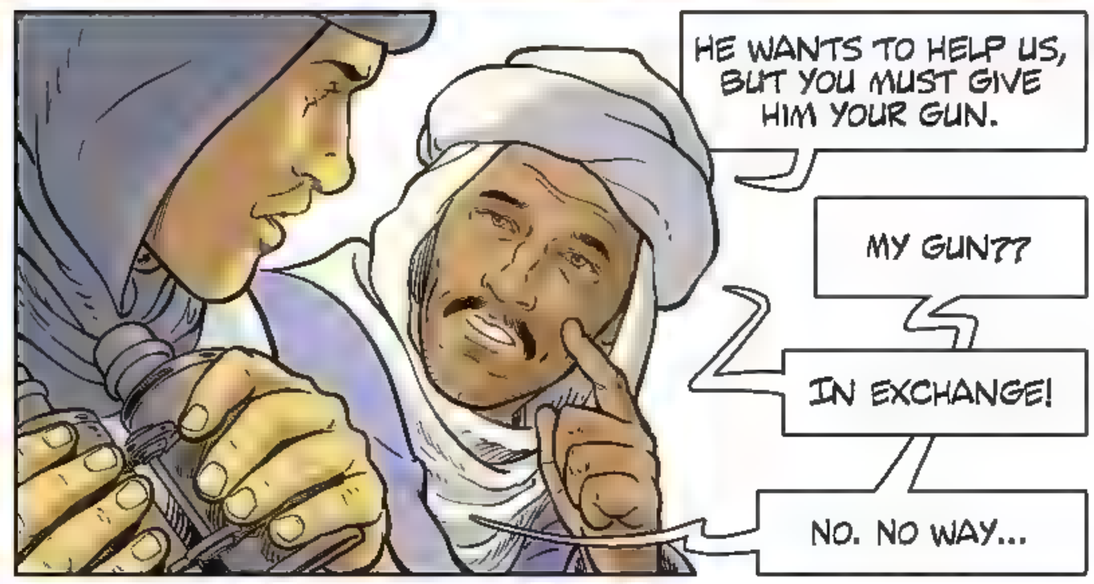
MOUYANE, ASK HIM WHAT FAMILY HE COMES FROM.

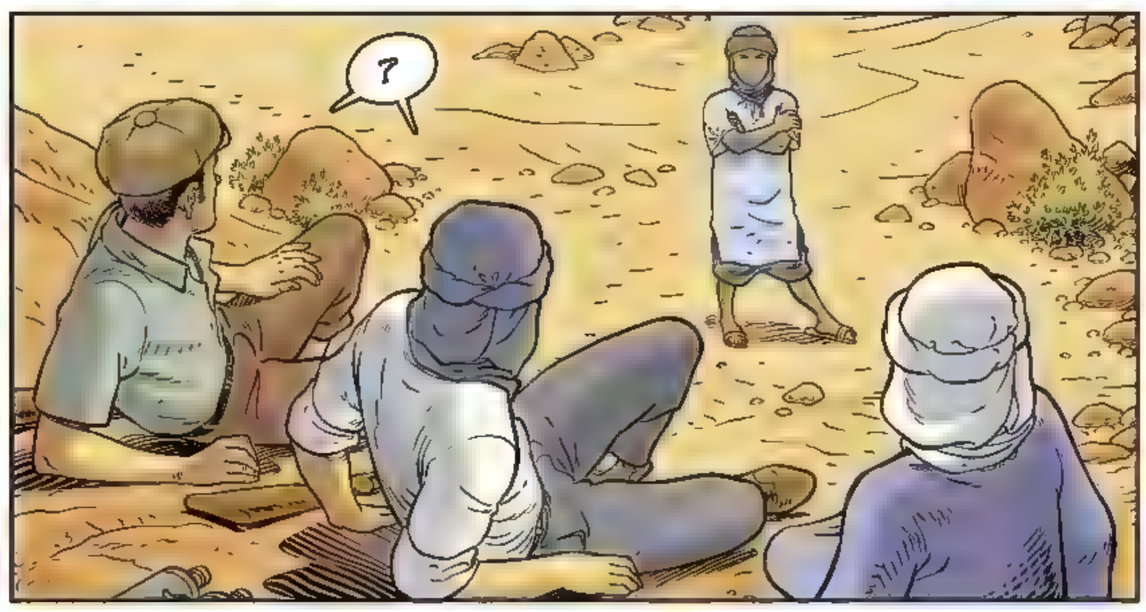
ENRIQUE AND I WILL KEEP WATCHING THE CAMP. HE'LL BE HAPPIER TALKING TO YOU ALONE. HE PROBABLY THINKS WE'RE DEVILS...

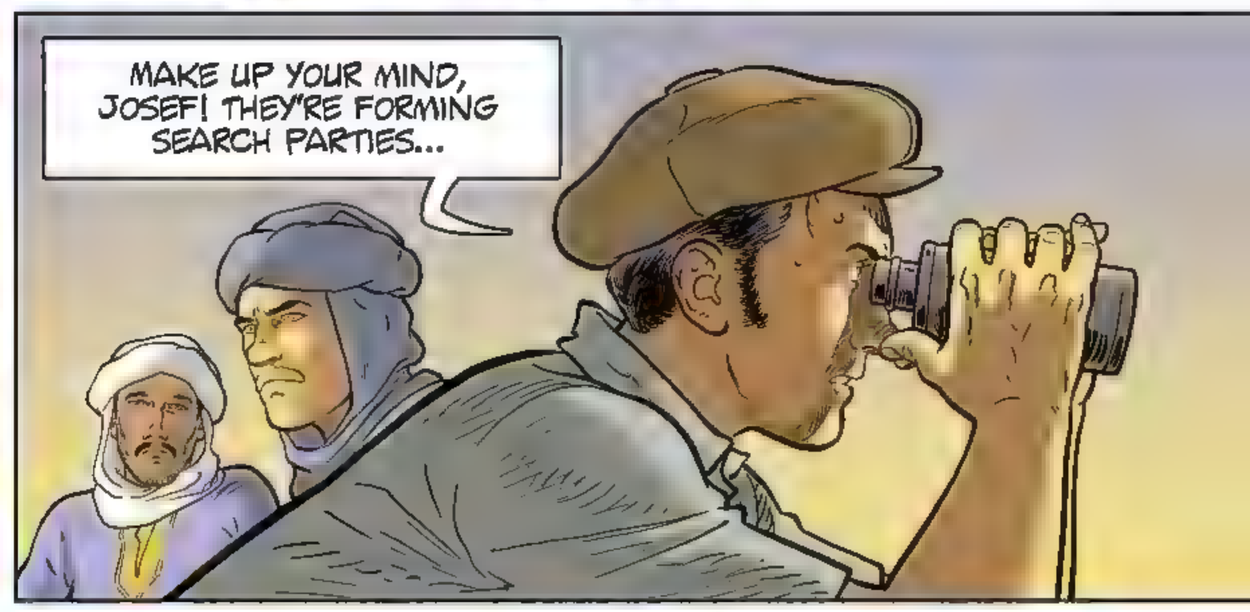
C'MON, ENRIQUE.

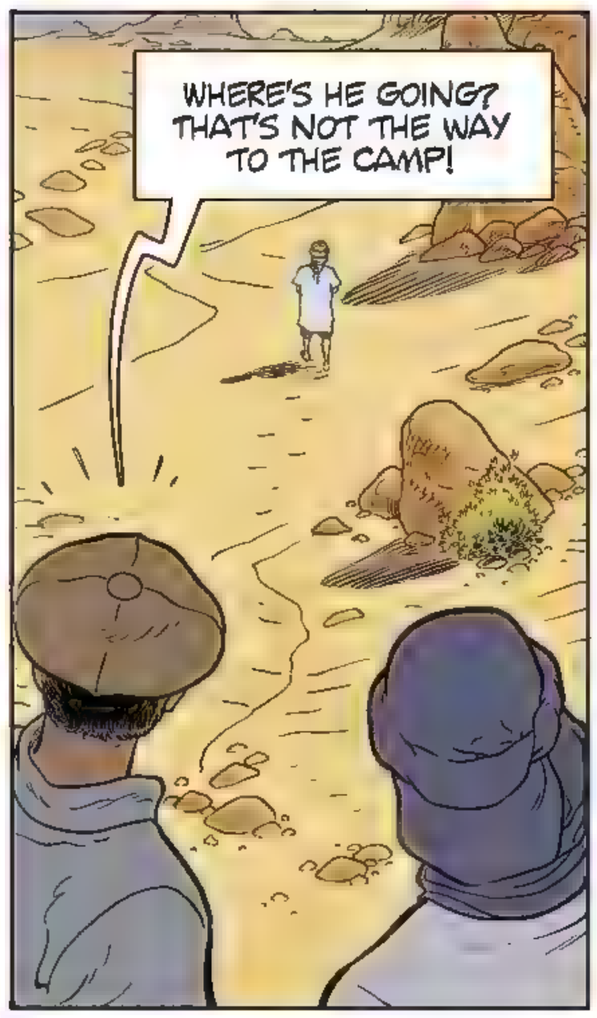

HEY! LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GETTING RILED DOWN THERE...
WE NEED TO MAKE UP OUR MINDS FAST.
PSSST... BOSS!

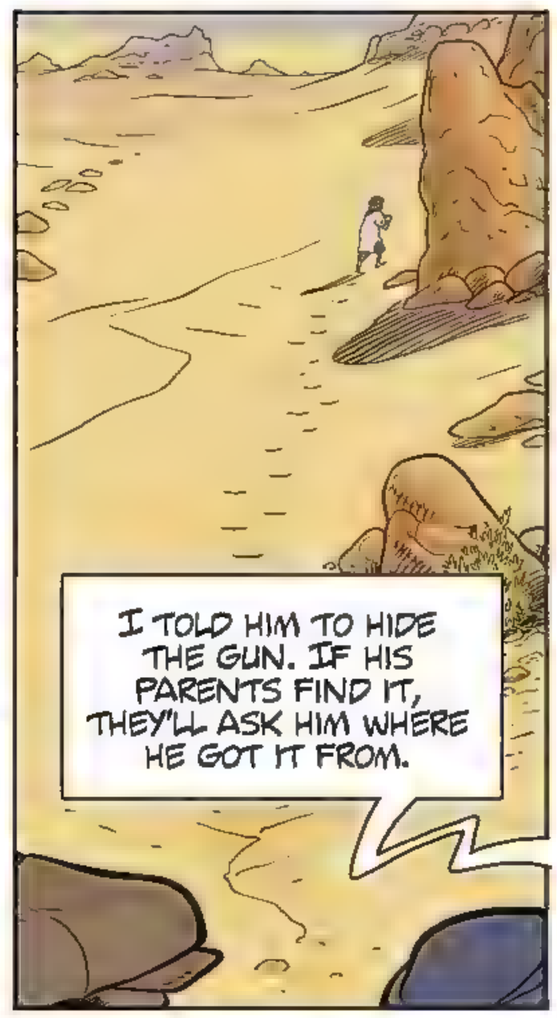

HIS NAME IS ABDALLAH. HIS UNCLE IS THE CHIEF, BUT HE HATES HIM BECAUSE HE'S CRUEL TO HIS MOTHER.

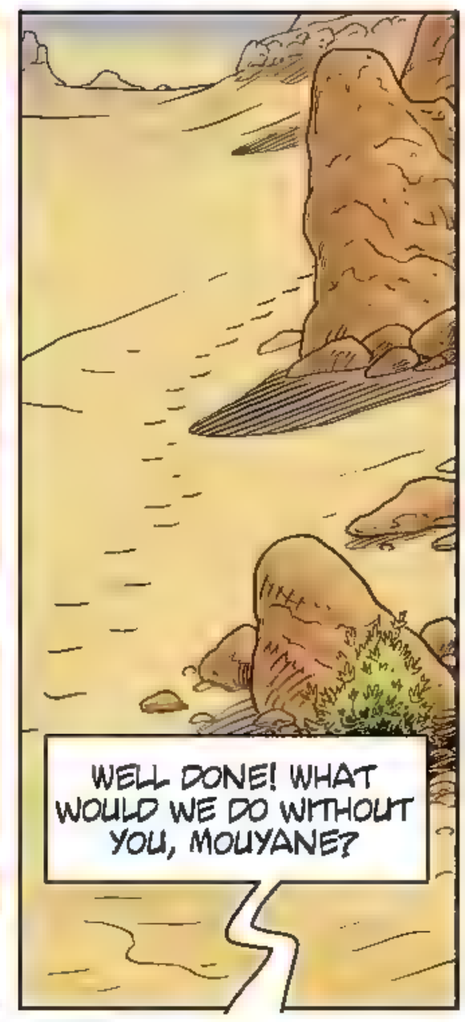

HE WANTS TO HELP US, BUT YOU MUST GIVE HIM YOUR GUN.
MY GUN??
IN EXCHANGE!
NO. NO WAY...


?

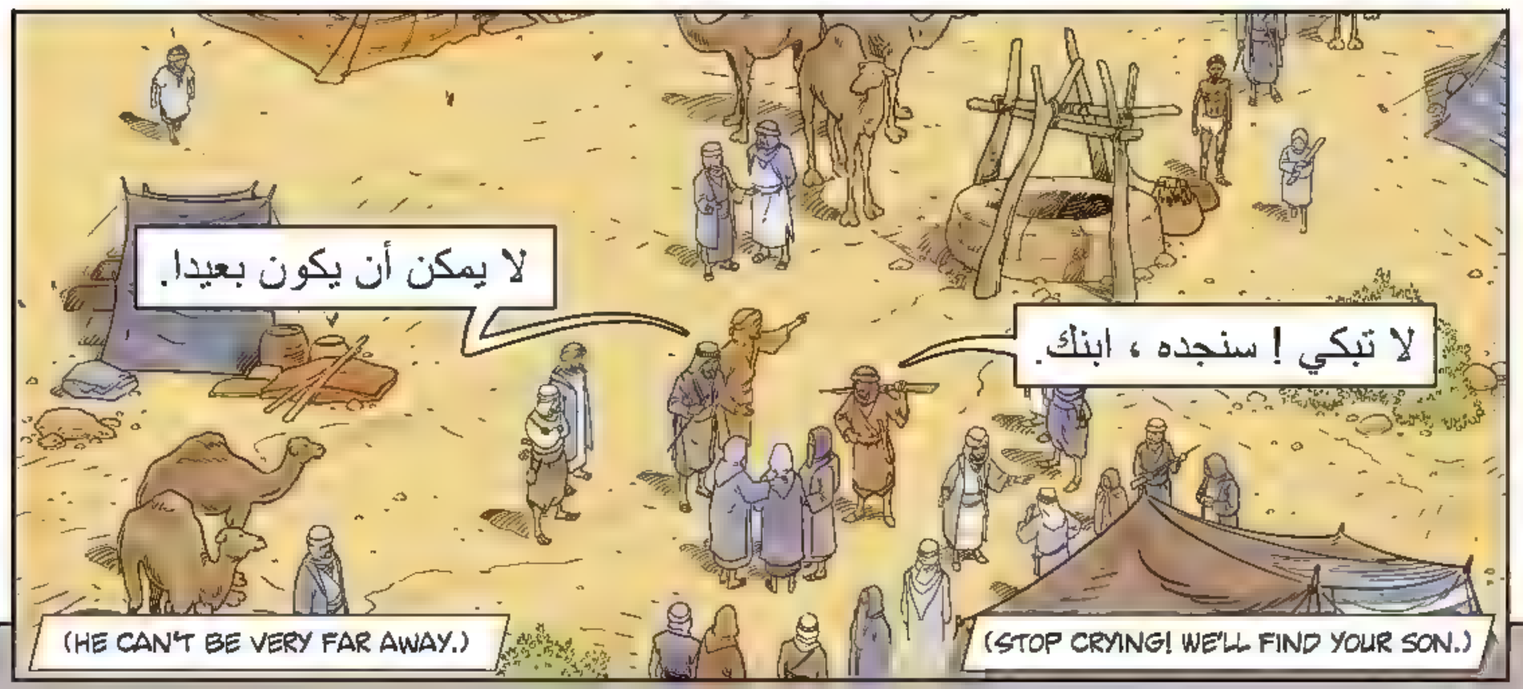

MAKE UP YOUR MIND, JOSEF! THEY'RE FORMING SEARCH PARTIES...

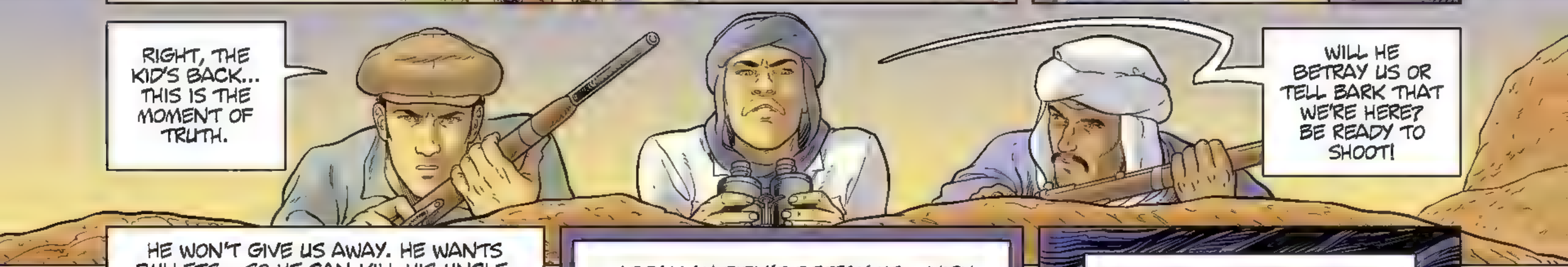

WHERE'S HE GOING? THAT'S NOT THE WAY TO THE CAMP!


I TOLD HIM TO HIDE THE GUN. IF HIS PARENTS FIND IT, THEY'LL ASK HIM WHERE HE GOT IT FROM.

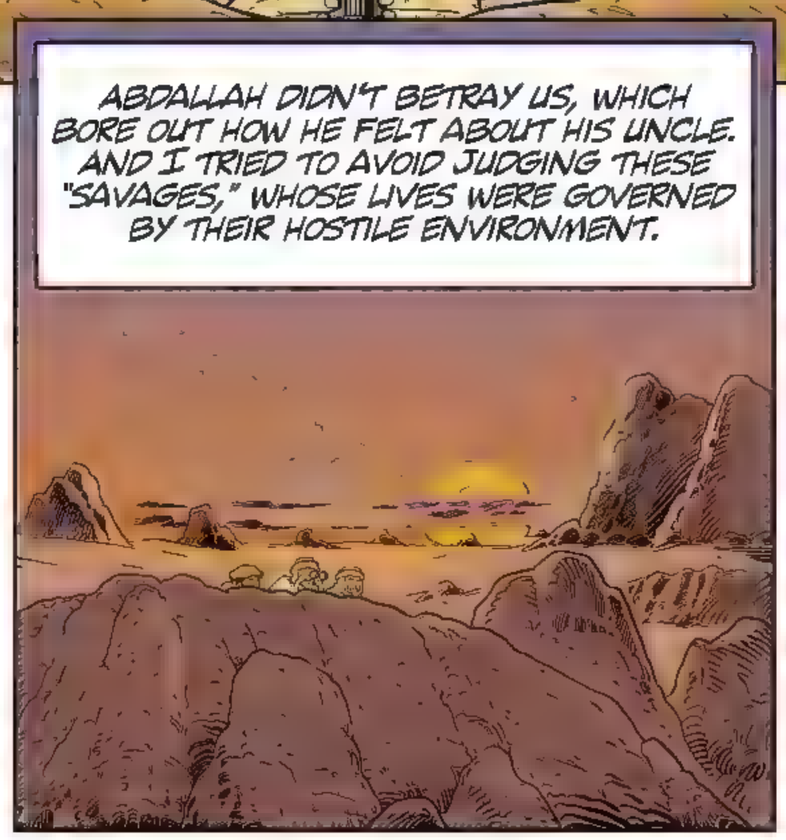

WELL DONE! WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT YOU, MOUYANE?

عبد الله! ومن هنا!
(ABDALLAH! HE'S HERE!)


لا تبكي ! سنجده ، ابنك.
(STOP CRYING! WE'LL FIND YOUR SON.)
لا يمكن أن يكون بعيدا.
(HE CAN'T BE VERY FAR AWAY.)

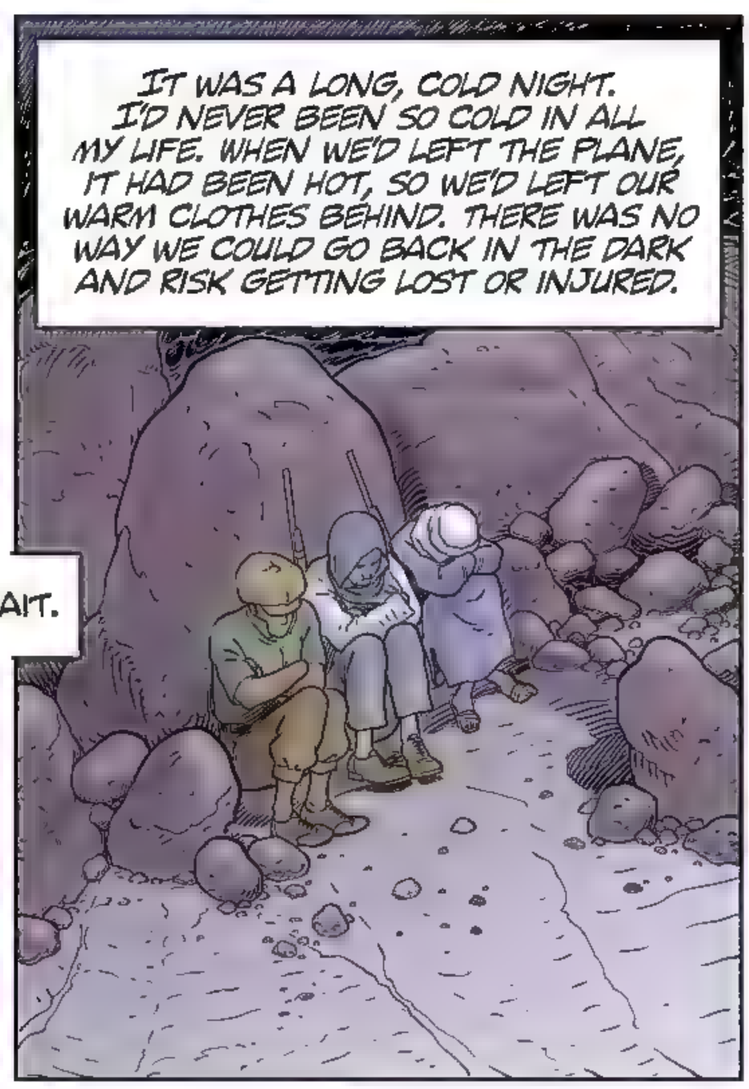

WILL HE BETRAY US OR TELL BARK THAT WE'RE HERE? BE READY TO SHOOT!
RIGHT, THE KID'S BACK... THIS IS THE MOMENT OF TRUTH.

HE WON'T GIVE US AWAY. HE WANTS BULLETS... SO HE CAN KILL HIS UNCLE.
MIRGEN SANTA! A LITTLE KID?! I TELL YOU, THEY'RE SAVAGES!
HE'D KILL HIS OWN UNCLE? DOES HE HATE HIM THAT MUCH?!


ABDALLAH DIDN'T BETRAY US, WHICH BORE OUT HOW HE FELT ABOUT HIS UNCLE. AND I TRIED TO AVOID JUDGING THESE "SAVAGES," WHOSE LIVES WERE GOVERNED BY THEIR HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

BUT BARK DIDN'T SHOW.
THE KID DIDN'T TELL HIM...
OR ELSE THEY WON'T LET BARK OUT OF THE CAMP.

WE WAIT?
WE WAIT.


IT WAS A LONG, COLD NIGHT. I'D NEVER BEEN SO COLD IN ALL MY LIFE. WHEN WE'D LEFT THE PLANE, IT HAD BEEN HOT, SO WE'D LEFT OUR WARM CLOTHES BEHIND. THERE WAS NO WAY WE COULD GO BACK IN THE DARK AND RISK GETTING LOST OR INJURED.

BUT OUR ICY VIGIL WASN'T IN VAIN...

SHIT!!

أين تذهبون ؟

؟

WHAT'S HE SAYING TO THEM?

(WHERE ARE YOU GOING?)

العودة إلى المخيم !

(GET BACK TO THE CAMP!)

SHALL I KILL THIS ASSHOLE?

NO...! THE NOISE WILL WAKE THE WHOLE TRIBE...

GOT TO THINK FAST!

بمساعدة !

؟

(HELP!)

هنا ! طيار جريح.

؟!

(HERE! A WOUNDED PILOT!)

؟

من أين أتى ؟

ماذا اعرف ؟

(WHERE DID HE COME FROM?)

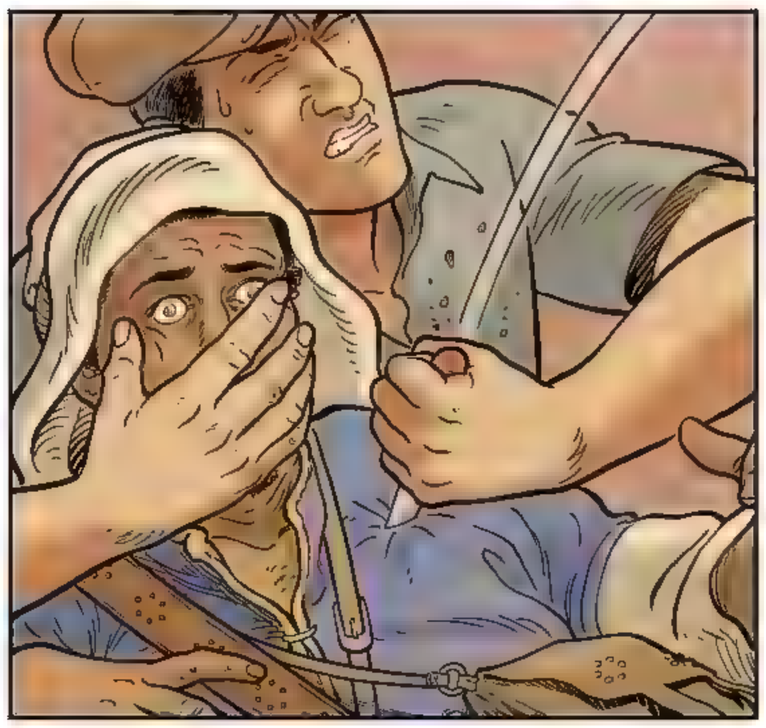
(HOW SHOULD I KNOW?)

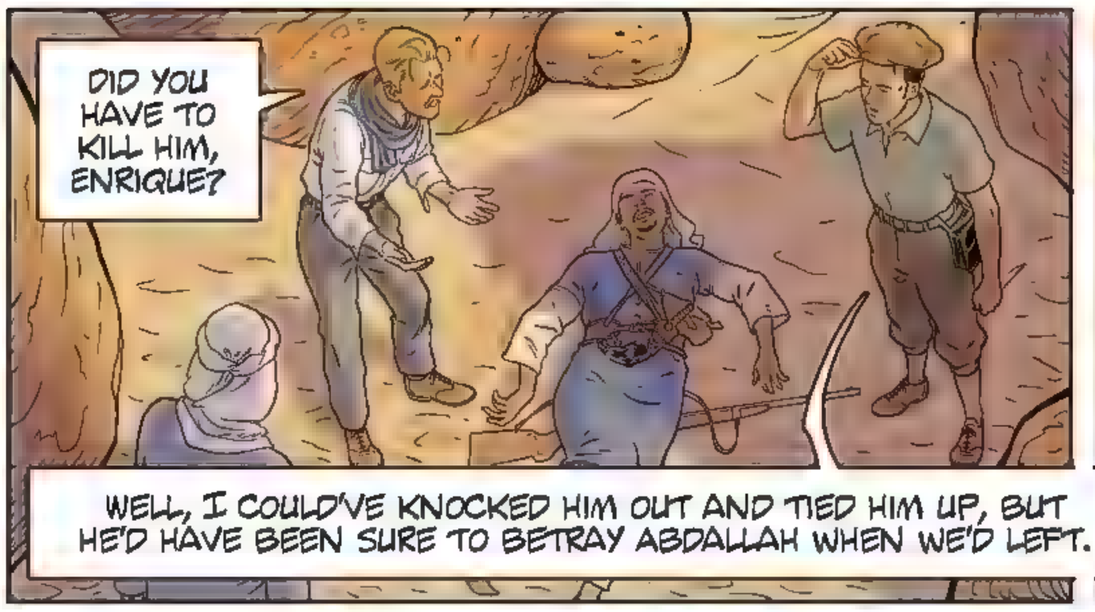
لقد مات ؟

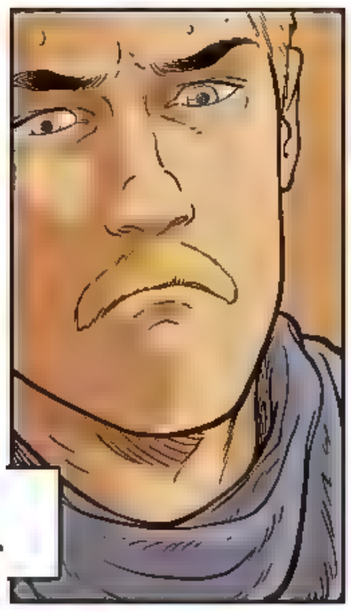
(IS HE DEAD?)

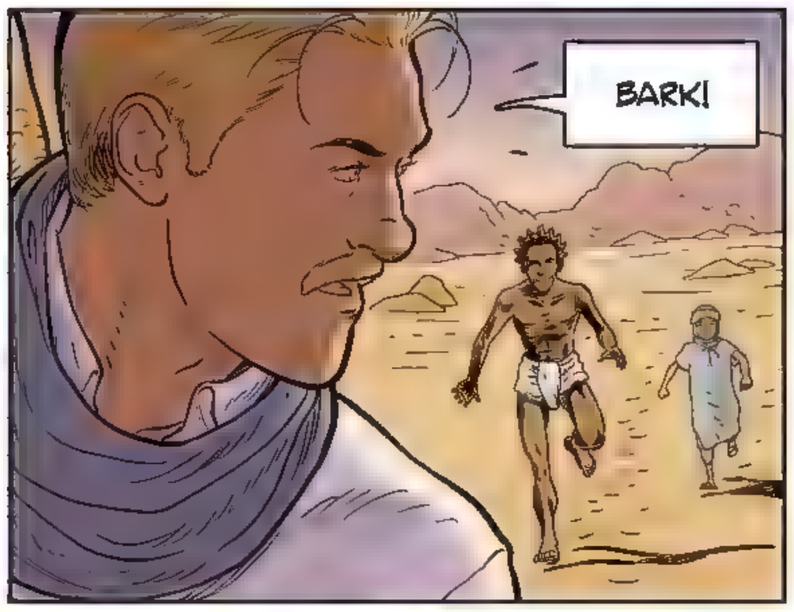
MMFF!

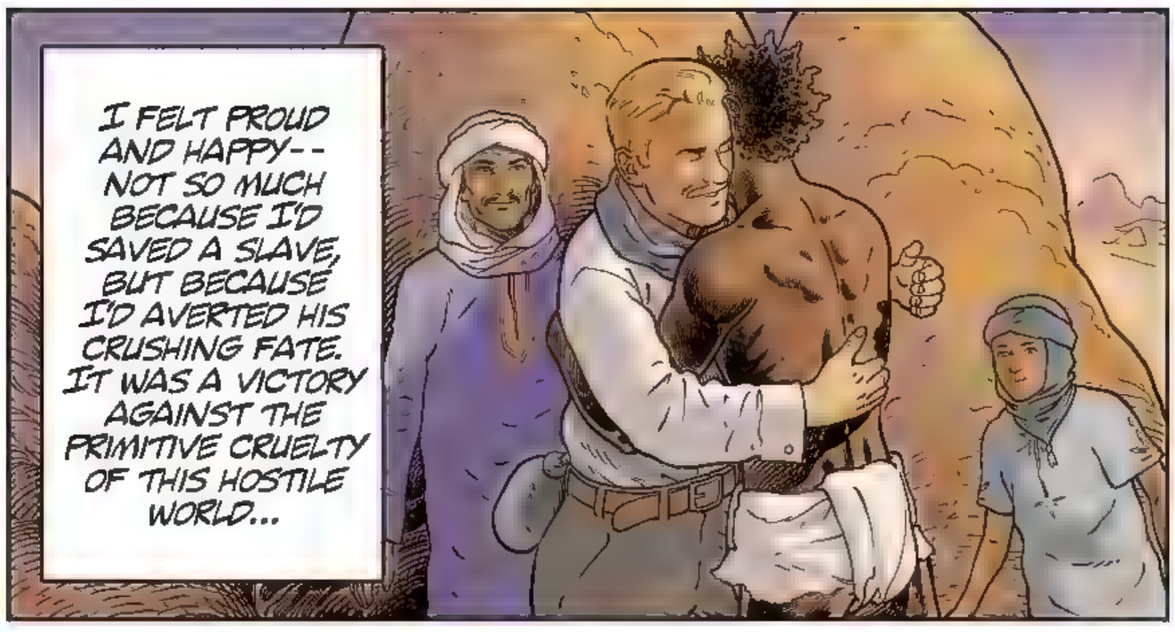
?

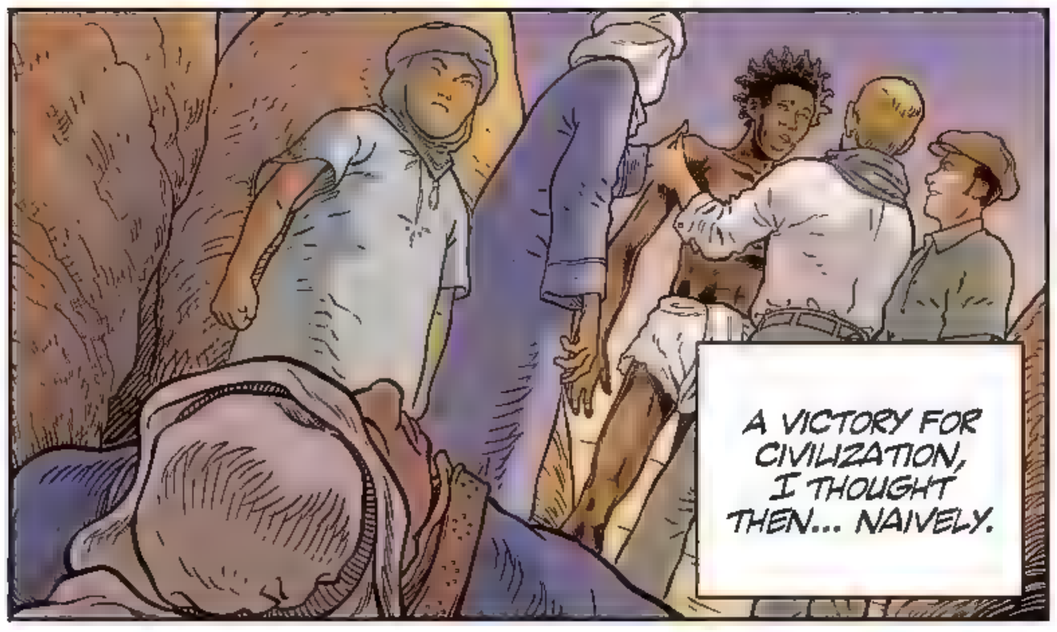


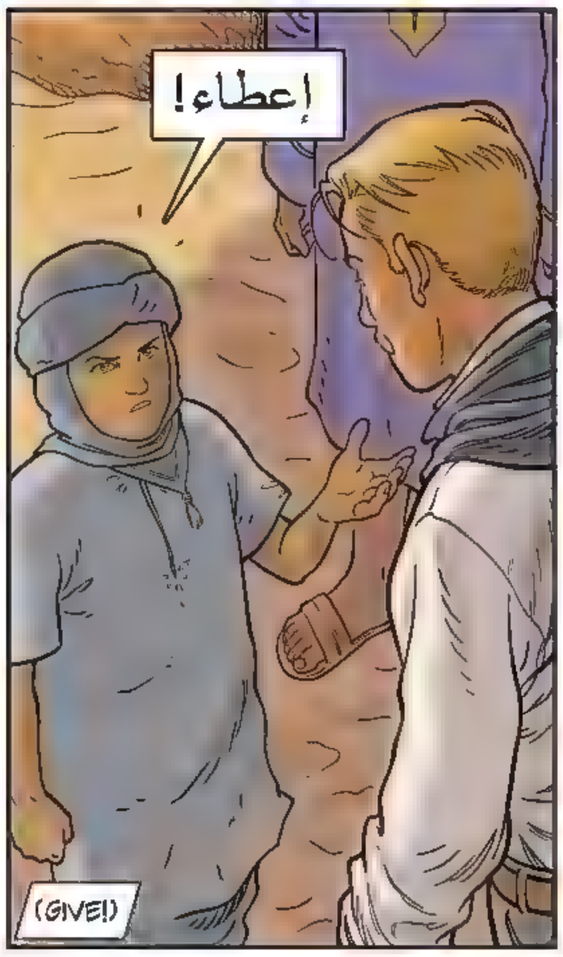

DID YOU HAVE TO KILL HIM, ENRIQUE?
WELL, I COULD'VE KNOCKED HIM OUT AND TIED HIM UP, BUT HE'D HAVE BEEN SURE TO BETRAY ABDALLAH WHEN WE'D LEFT.

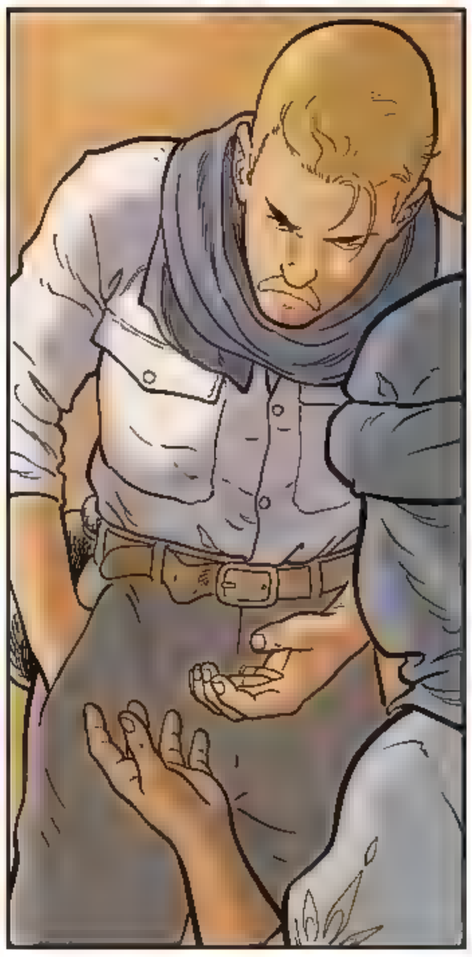


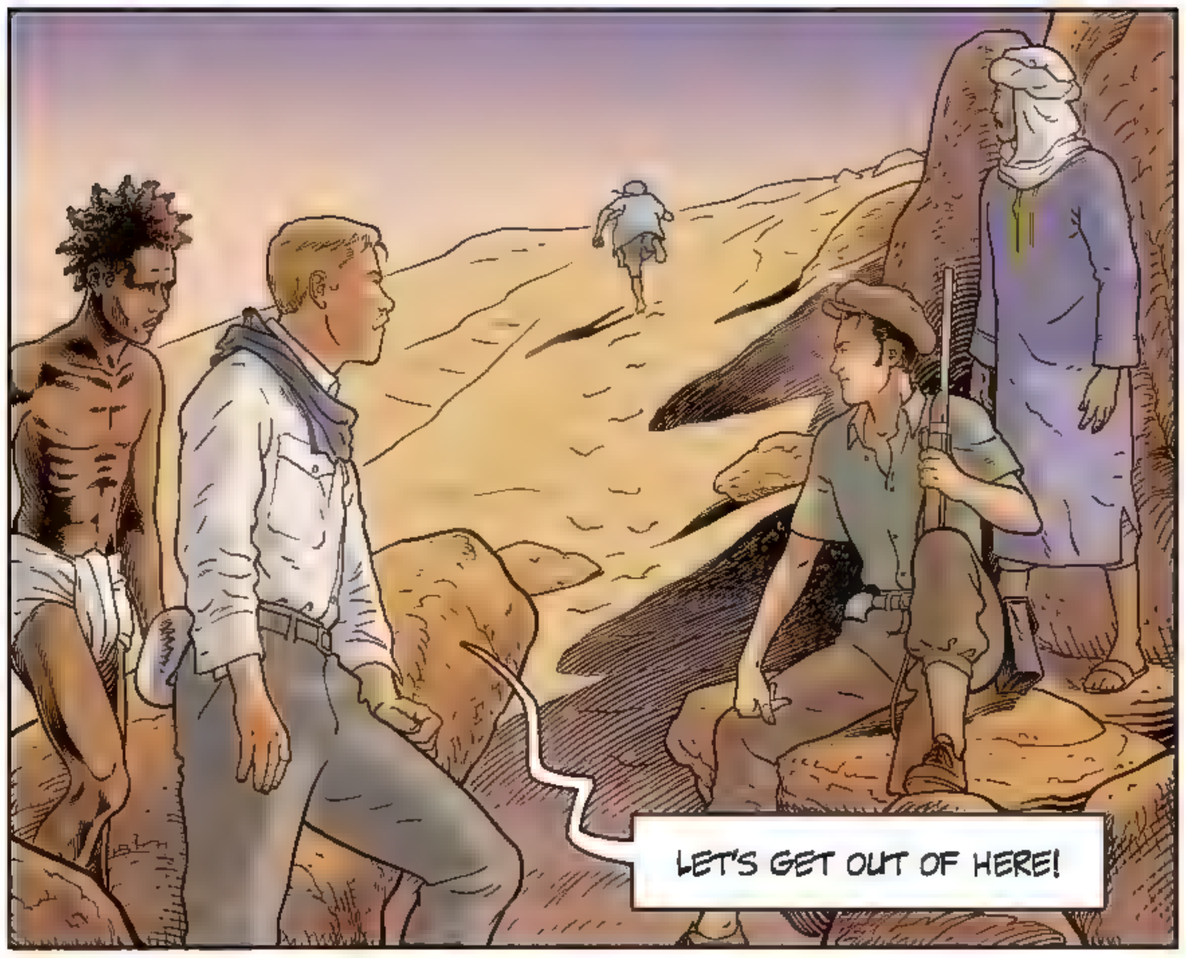

BARK!

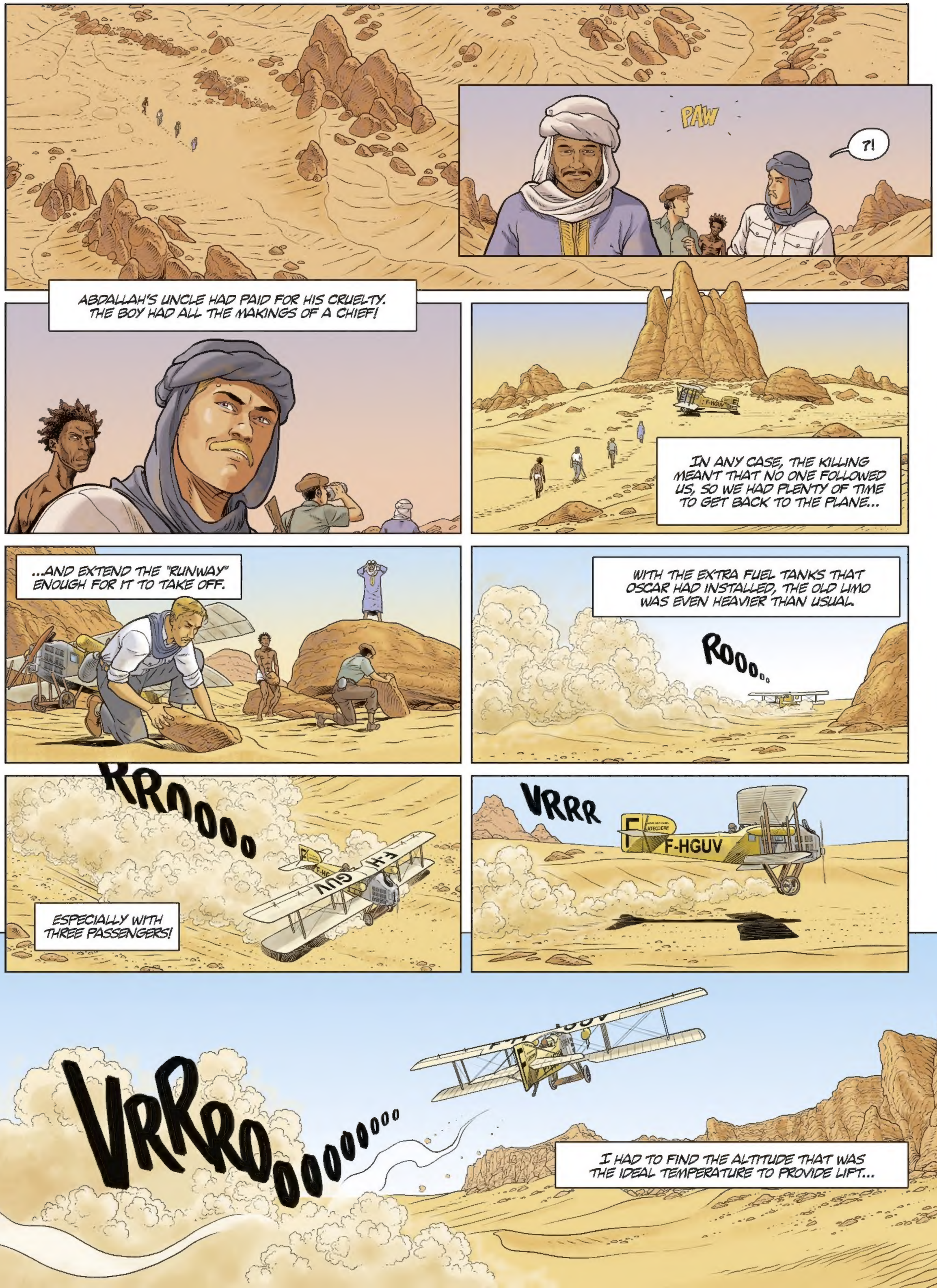

I FELT PROUD AND HAPPY-- NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE I'D SAVED A SLAVE, BUT BECAUSE I'D AVERTED HIS CRUSHING FATE. IT WAS A VICTORY AGAINST THE PRIMITIVE CRUELTY OF THIS HOSTILE WORLD...

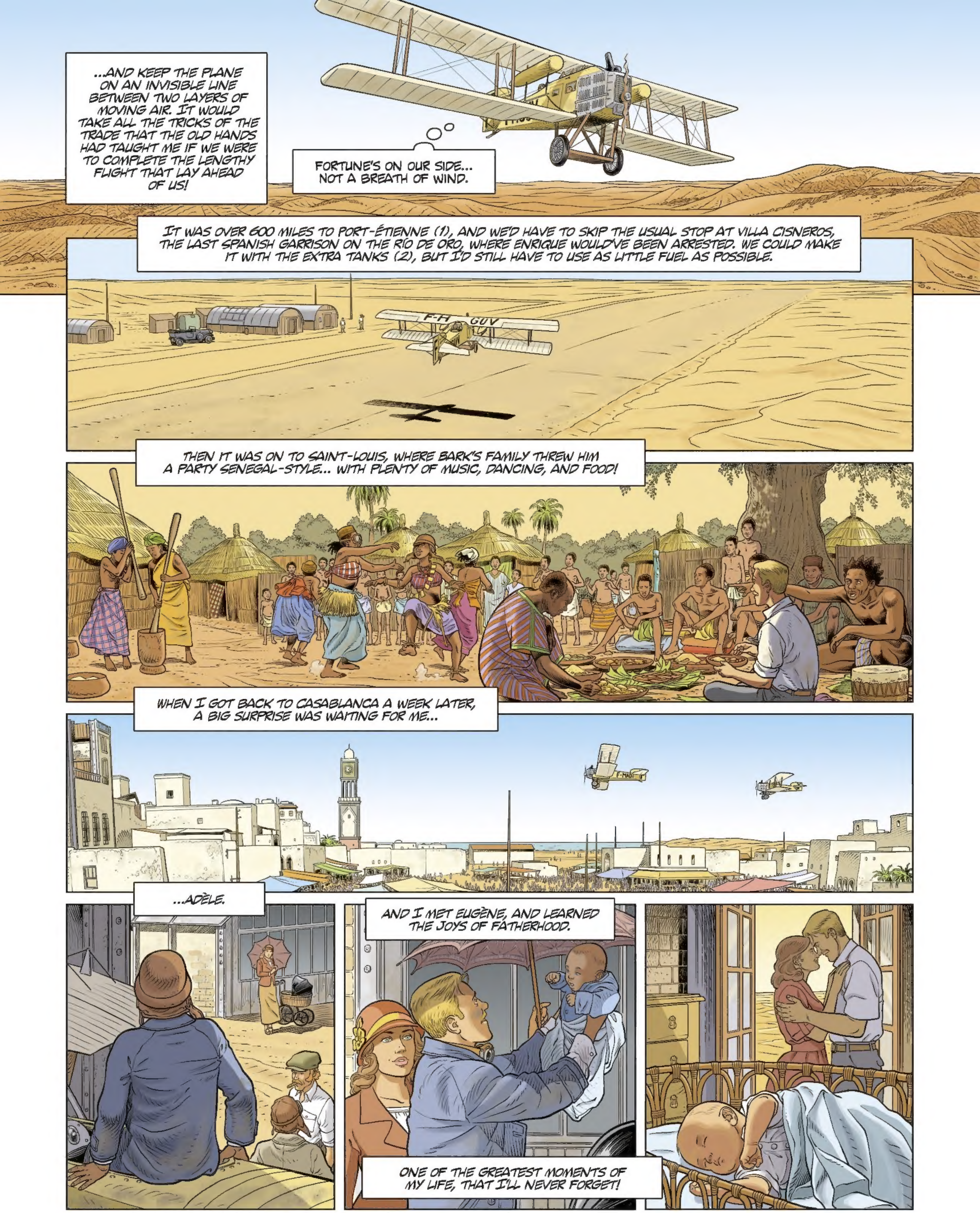

A VICTORY FOR CIVILIZATION, I THOUGHT THEN... NAIVELY.


إعطاء!
(GIVE!)




LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!


PAW
?!
ABDALLAH'S UNCLE HAD PAID FOR HIS CRUELTY. THE BOY HAD ALL THE MAKINGS OF A CHIEF!
IN ANY CASE, THE KILLING MEANT THAT NO ONE FOLLOWED US, SO WE HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO GET BACK TO THE PLANE...
...AND EXTEND THE "RUNWAY" ENOUGH FOR IT TO TAKE OFF.
WITH THE EXTRA FUEL TANKS THAT OSCAR HAD INSTALLED, THE OLD LIMO WAS EVEN HEAVIER THAN USUAL.
ROOOOO
KROOOOO
ESPECIALLY WITH THREE PASSENGERS!
VRRR
F-HGUV
VRRROOOOOOOO
I HAD TO FIND THE ALTITUDE THAT WAS THE IDEAL TEMPERATURE TO PROVIDE LIFT...



(1) MODERN-DAY NOUADHIBOU IN MAURITANIA.

(2) WITHOUT THEM, A BREGUET XIV HAD A RANGE OF ONLY 400 MILES.

January 9, 1926. Adèle and I get married at the Église du Sacré-Cœur in Casablanca.
-1926-
February 1926. Pierre, a pilot on the Casablanca-Dakar route, grows a "metal tree" on the runway during a sandstorm. I forget his surname. He was killed two months later.
With the cavalry officer who saved me from marauding Reguibats—and from almost certain imprisonment and torture—after my engine blew up 20 miles from Cape Juby.
COMUNICACIONES
20C ESPAÑA C 20
MAROC
1fr.
POSTE·FRANÇAISE
END

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to my old friend Marc Dolidier, aviation buff and recreational pilot, for his technical advice and attentive reading.

JCK

EUROPE COMICS - ALL DIGITAL. ALL EUROPEAN.
www.europecomics.com

This work is published as an e-book under the collective imprint Europe Comics, coordinated by Mediatoon Licensing. For rights queries, please contact Mediatoon at contact.mfr@mediatoon.com, or visit http://www.mediatoon-foreignrights.com.

© 2020 – DARGAUD – Kraehn & Millien
Translation: Joseph Laredo
Editing: Dan Lockwood
Lettering: Cromatik Ltd.
Original title: L'Aviateur 3 – Les Courriers du désert
Originally published in French by DARGAUD in 2018
All rights reserved.
www.dargaud.com

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union